

Snakes

Snake Bites and Common Michigan Snakes

After a natural disaster, snakes may be forced from their natural habitats and move into areas where they would not normally be seen; be cautious of snakes that may have sought shelter in the home. Be aware that snakes may be swimming in the water to get to higher ground and may be hiding under debris or other objects. If a snake is seen, back away from it slowly, do not touch it.

Signs of a Snake Bite

When walking in high water or grass a person may feel a bite and think it is another kind of bite or scratch and not be aware that they have been bitten by a snake. Pay attention to the following snake bite signs. *Depending on the type of snake, the signs and symptoms may include:*

- A pair of puncture marks at the wound
- Redness and swelling around the bite
- Severe pain at the site of the bite
- Labored breathing (*in extreme cases, breathing may stop all together*)
- Disturbed vision
- Increased salivation and sweating
- Numbness or tingling around the face and/or limbs
- Nausea and vomiting

What to Do if Bitten by a Snake

- If bitten, try to see and remember the color and shape of the snake, which can help with the treatment of the snake bite.
- Keep the bitten person still and calm. This can slow down the spread of the venom if the snake is poisonous.
- Seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- Apply first aid if unable to get person to the hospital right away.
- Lay or sit the person down with the bite below the level of the heart.
- Tell him/ or her to stay calm and still.
- Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing.

What Not to Do if Bitten by a Snake

- Do not pick up the snake or try to trap it.
- Do not apply a tourniquet.
- Do not slash the wound with a knife.
- Do not suck out the venom.
- Do not apply ice or immerse wound in water.
- Do not drink alcohol as a pain killer.
- Do not drink caffeinated beverages.

Snakes of Michigan (17 known species)



The Black Rat Snake is the largest of the snakes to be found in Michigan. It can grow up to 2.4 meters. It is non-venomous to humans. These snakes have grey/blue eyes set against a black and brown patterned body. They are mainly found in the lower half of the state and are protected by law as they have become rare and their numbers are in decline.

The Blue Racer Snake, once common, has been under attack from persecution and loss of habitat and its numbers have fallen in many parts. These snakes are non-venomous but will bite if threatened or handled. They can grow to 2 meters in length. They are constrictors and kill by crushing in the coils of their body. Typical diet is small animals, frogs, insects, rodents and other small snakes.



The Brown Snake is a smaller snake with a light cream or whitish under belly and a brown or gray back with a light stripe and black dots on either side of the stripe. They grow to around 40cm but are often shorter than this. They are shy and rarely seen creatures that feed mainly on slugs and earthworms. They are non-venomous.

Butler's Garter Snake is a small snake of about 40-65cm in length as adults. They are a dark colored snake in either brown, black or dark olive coloring, and yellow stripes and a yellow belly. Some snakes have dark spots between their stripes. Their favorite food is earthworms and they are found typically in the south and eastern Lower Peninsula.



Common Garter Snake is the most common of the Michigan snakes and can be found almost anywhere from open fields to urban areas and back yards. They are a medium size snake of about 1-1.2 meters in length. They are colored gray, green or brown with 3 yellow stripes on their back in a checkered pattern. The most noted feature is a red tongue with black tip. They have a light colored pale belly. They feed on earthworms, small mammals, fish, frogs and toads. They are not known to bite and are non-venomous but do give off a nasty smelling secretion if handled or threatened.

Copper-Bellied Water Snake is one of the bigger snakes reaching an adult length of up to 1.5 meters. They are an extremely rare species with a very low population and are listed as an "endangered species" in Michigan and "nationally threatened species" with the US Fish and Wildlife Services. They feed on small reptiles and insect larvae and tadpoles. One interesting fact about this species is that they are one of 10 species of snake that do not lay eggs but give birth to living young.



Eastern Hog-Nosed Snake, as its name suggests looks a little different from regular snakes. It has a shorter but thicker or fatter body with an up-turned nose. They grow up to around 1 meter in length and contrary to public belief; they are not harmful to humans. When they are threatened they can puff up their neck and body with air and hiss loudly which makes them appear aggressive. They have also been named "puff adder" and "hissing viper" for their behavior. They can be found mostly in the western and northern lower peninsulas.



Report suspect Eastern Massasauga snake bites:

http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/wildlife/pubs/massasauga_obsreport.asp



Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is Michigan's only venomous snake. They feed mainly on small rodents, crayfish and other small mammals that burrow in marshland areas. It has a thick body colored with a dark rectangular pattern against a lighter brown or gray back. The underside is black or almost black in color and it is also the only snake in Michigan to carry the segmented tail rattle. A notable feature is the vertical pupil in both eyes, similar to that of a cat. The head is a triangular shape which is very characteristic of the rattlesnake family. These snakes can grow up to almost 1 meter in length. They have short fangs and potent venom. Keep clear of these snakes if you encounter one.

Eastern Milk Snake is a slim snake with smooth scales. It has reddish or brown patches on a light gray or tan background color. These can be identified by a light "Y" or "V" shaped marking just behind the head. The belly is white with a black checkerboard pattern. They can grow to around 1.2 meters in length. They feed mainly on small rodents found around farm buildings. They may bite if threatened or handled but are non-venomous and harmless to humans.



Fox Snake. There are two species of Fox Snake found in Michigan. The Eastern Fox snake prefers the marshlands and wet areas while the Western Fox Snake can be found around wooded areas and fields. They grow up to 1.5 meters in length so are a medium sized creature. They can be recognized by the pattern of dark brown blotches on a light brown or yellow back with a red or orange head. The underside is yellow. They feed on rodents, birds and frogs and will coil and strike if threatened but are non-venomous to humans.

Kirtland's Snake is a small snake which grows up to 45 cm in length. It is found most often around swampy woodlands and wet meadows and feeds on earthworms and slugs. It stays underground most of the time. It can be recognized by its small reddish brown body with four rows and dark blotches down its back. It has a red or pink belly patterned with a row of black dots along each side. When threatened they will flatten their bodies. They rarely bite and are non-venomous and harmless to humans. These snakes are now listed as "endangered by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.



Northern Ribbon Snake is a slim snake that can grow up to almost a meter in length. It has quite striking colors with a black or dark brown body adorned with bright yellow or white stripes running the length of its body and a distinctive black head and white scales around its mouth. These snakes live around marshlands, lakes and ponds and are good swimmers. They feed on small reptiles and fish mainly.

Northern Water Snake can grow up to 1.2 meters in length and is found along the shorelines of lakes, ponds and streams. They are a light brown or gray color with dark bands and a white belly with crescent shaped markings. Some have been found with orange speckled bellies and have been confused with the Copper Bellied Water snake. They feed on frogs and fish and are good swimmers, often retreating to the safety of the water if threatened. They will bite if handled or cornered but are not venomous and are harmless to humans.



Queen Snake is a slim brown or gray snake with a light or yellow stripe on each side of its body. Three narrow black stripes may be visible on its back. The light colored belly has four dark colored stripes along its length. These snakes can grow up to just under a meter in length. They can be found near streams or other shallow water where they feed mainly on Crayfish. They are harmless to humans.

Red-Bellied Snake are very small snakes and typically grow to no more than 40 cm in length. They are a slim snake with brown or gray body and red or orange unmarked belly and faint stripes down its back. They can be found in woods and fields or around rubbish dumps and feed mainly on slugs, snails and worms. They are not venomous. They are very common though all of Michigan.



Ring-Necked Snake is a shiny scaled snake with gray or black back, yellow belly and a yellow ring around its neck. They are small and grow to around a maximum 60 cm in length. They can be found around woodland areas and feed on worms, small snakes and small reptiles. They are generally rare to see. They are not venomous and are harmless to humans.

Smooth Green Snake is a small bright green snake with smooth scales and white or yellowish belly. They grow to a maximum of 0.5 meters in length. They are a gentle snake and can be found in grasslands where they blend in with their environment more easily. They feed mainly on insects and their dwindling numbers may be a result of insecticides in use. They can be handled and seldom bite but will leave a musky slim on their captor from anal secretions. They are non-venomous and harmless to humans.



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES www.michigan.gov/dnr

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH ADMINISTRATION www.osha.gov