

Safety Precautions in Copperhead Country

The Northern Copperhead is the most widespread and common of Virginia's three venomous snakes. Copperheads are found in wooded habitats throughout the state, including rural, suburban, and even some urban areas. They are generally calm-natured animals that lie quietly, depending on their excellent camouflage to escape detection. However they will strike if accidentally stepped on or otherwise threatened. Bites can be serious if venom is actually injected, causing much pain and swelling. However, human fatalities are extremely, extremely rare.

Learn what a copperhead looks like. If you find one, leave it alone. Some bites occur when people try to kill or move the snake. Most snakes that you are likely to encounter will not be a copperhead, timber rattlesnake, or cottonmouth. All of Virginia's other native snakes are harmless. Photos of all of our venomous and harmless species can be seen at:

http://www.virginiaherpetologicalsociety.com/reptiles/snakes/snakes_of_virginia.htm .

Not just photos, this site will link you to a wealth of other information about our native snakes.

Around the home or cabin:

- Keep vegetation thinned and trimmed.
- Remove piles of brush and leaves well away from walkways and play areas.
- Be alert when working around stacks of firewood and lumber.
- Use heavy work gloves when handling firewood and building supplies.
- Wear shoes or boots when walking outside.
- Use a flashlight at night in warm weather. Shine before you step.
- Use a flashlight when working in a dark shed, garage, or barn.
- Remove spilled bird seed that might attract rodents (favorite copperhead prey).

When roaming the great outdoors:

- Always stay alert!
- A hiking staff or trekking pole can be a useful safety tool.
- Wear hiking boots rather than sneakers.
- Walk on established trails as much as possible.
- Be careful when stepping over logs; first look on the far side.
- Be cautious in rocky terrain.
- Don't put your hands or feet in places where you can't see.
- Avoid thick vegetation that limits your vision.

If you will follow the guidelines above, you will significantly reduce the already low chance of being bitten by a copperhead or other venomous snake.

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