

## AzPDIC Rattlesnake Bite Recovery - Primary Care Provider Guidance

**Background:** Recovery following rattlesnake bite can be a prolonged and difficult process. The Arizona Poison and Drug Information Center (AzPDIC) recommends all rattlesnake bite patients be seen by their primary care provider 5-10 days post bite for wound evaluation and to screen for potential complications.

### Appointment Checklist

1. Interview and examine the patient for evidence of common complications.
2. Educate the patient on proper wound care and self-monitoring for complications.
3. Provide pain meds, antibiotics, antihistamines, and steroids as needed.
4. Referrals for physical therapy, wound care, and psych services if needed.
5. Currently, AzPDIC only recommends obtaining a CBC, PT/INR and fibrinogen level for patients with extensive bruising, abnormal bleeding, or symptoms of anemia.

### Incidence and Onset of Common Complications Following Rattlesnake Envenomation in Arizona

Description		Days Post Bite	Incidence
Pain, Lymphedema, Functional Impairment		14	67%
		90	34%
		180	10%
Wound Complications	Blisters/Blebs, Necrosis	1-5	30%
	Antibiotics	-	15%
	Surgical Debridement	-	5%
Serum Sickness	Rash Only	3-18	40%
	Flu Like Syndrome	3-18	10%
Bleeding (Unprovoked)	Trivial	1-14	26%
	Life-Threatening (Hgb < 8.0 g/dL)	2-5	1-2%
DVT/PE (Developing Outpatient)		9-16	<1%
New Feelings of Stress, Anxiety, Agitation, Insomnia, Nightmares		5-21	30%

Reported incidence rates are based on data compiled from records of the 4,582 rattlesnake consultations placed to the AzPDIC between 01/01/1999 – 12/31/2023.

**Tissue Injury:** Venom directly damages vasculature, impairing circulation and complicating wound healing. Painful swelling affects **>90%** of patients, typically worsening with activity throughout the day and improving with elevation. Non-healing wounds increase the risk of serious infection (cellulitis, gangrene, osteomyelitis) or permanent disability (contracture formation, foot drop, tendon rupture, CRPS). Blisters occur when venom toxins degrade the basement membrane. This results in losing the amount of normal mechanical tension on cells and can dramatically affect the tissue regeneration process. Patients who develop blisters are at a much higher risk of complications and require close follow up outpatient. About **15%** of patients return to the hospital, mostly due to wound complications.

**Psychiatric Sequelae:** Rattlesnake bites are a traumatic event characterized by severe pain, prolonged loss of physical function, and large hospital bills for some patients. **61%** of our patients are bitten at home, and **81%** were unaware of the snake prior to being bitten. We routinely have patents describing hypervigilant behaviors to us or inquiring about snakebite support groups. PTSD after a snakebite is well recognized internationally.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call AzPDIC (**520-626-6016**). More information related to rattlesnakes, snakebite treatment, and recovery is discussed in-depth in our monthly newsletter, "News From The Pit". Scan QR code or visit [azpoison.com/content/news-pit](http://azpoison.com/content/news-pit)

