

Safety Corner

School is out for the summer. So are the snakes.



According to the California Poison Control Center, over 800 people are bitten by rattlesnakes in California each year. On average, two die. The spring and summer months are the most dangerous as snakes and humans cross paths more frequently. Learning how to avoid being a painful statistic is easy but practicing snake avoidance takes a little work.

Both times I have been struck at by rattlesnakes I have been walking over broken rocks far from roads or buildings. Fortunately both times the snake missed its mark, and both times I was wearing high-topped hiking boots.

First lesson: watch where you are walking and where you are putting your hands. Snakes frequently live in rocky areas, under logs, and under other debris such as brush or woodpiles. Snakes seek out safe places to hide and also hunt for rodents in these areas. Never step over a log without looking where you will be putting your foot first. Never reach into a crack in a rock, under a piece of wood, or anywhere else a snake may be taking refuge without looking first. Use a tool to move items that may harbor a hiding snake.

Second lesson: Ensure you are wearing the appropriate clothing when working around the school grounds and at home this summer. Sturdy boots may be a bit hot in the summer but it saved me. Twice. Loose fitting long pants will also protect you from bites; approximately 75% of snakebites result in venom injection but all bites are painful and must be treated by a doctor.

Third lesson: The first time a rattlesnake tried to strike me I was with a few other people, the second time I was by myself. It is far better to have someone around if you get struck, especially if you get a dose of venom. Try to work and play with a buddy nearby.

If you do get bitten, the most important thing is to stay calm. Carefully wash the area with soap and water. Remove any items that may constrict swelling like rings and watches. Immobilize the affected area and if you are 30 minutes from medical treatment keep the bite below the heart. Seek aid at the nearest medical facility. And remember: Stay Alert, Stay Alive!