



# Be a friend to **SNAKES**



Most snakes are completely harmless and provide natural rodent control.

Rattlesnakes are the only venomous snakes in Albuquerque. You can stay safe by keeping a distance and leashing your dog.

New Mexico is home to around 50 snake species, including eight endangered or threatened species. All snakes have important roles in our ecosystem, and most pose no threats to humans. Harmless snakes include gopher or bull snakes, coachwhips, garter snakes, rat snakes, and many others.

You're not very likely to see rattlesnakes in our city, but with the sprawl of homes encroaching on their natural habitat, it's good to be prepared. Western

diamondback rattlesnakes and prairie rattlesnakes are common venomous snakes, and they will defend themselves if people or pets approach.

It's not always easy to tell snakes apart. When spotting a snake, keep your distance and look at the head and tail: a rattlesnake has a wide triangular head, narrow neck, and a rattle at the tip of their tail. But don't rely on your ability to identify a snake: it's wise to leave any snake alone.

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## Snake Safety Tips: Keep Your Distance

Urban development has displaced and isolated snakes. It's difficult for a snake to move across unfriendly terrain and adapt to unfamiliar spaces. When you see a snake, give the snake space.

### When and where you may encounter snakes:

- Snakes are active from April through October. They leave their winter dens once the weather warms.
- Snakes stay in shaded areas and dark crevices when it's hot, and on warm surfaces, such as roads, when it's cool.
- Rattlesnakes can be out at any time, including at night.

### What to do when you see a snake:

- It's rare for a person to get bitten by a snake—in fact, you're six times more likely to die from a lightning strike than a snake bite!
- If a bite does happen, it's usually because people

tease, harass, or try to catch or kill a rattlesnake.

- Keep your distance—a rattlesnake bite means a trip to the hospital!
- Teach kids and pets to respect snakes and keep 10 feet away.
- Heed a rattlesnake's warning signs: when you hear a rattle, stop and back away.

### How you can help keep snakes safe:

- While driving, watch for snakes on the warm surface of paved roads.
- In your yard, remove any mesh that could entangle snakes.
- Don't use sticky or glue traps for rodents or pigeons.
- Don't use rodenticide, which can poison any animal that eats rodents.

## ACTION TIPS

# Be a friend to snakes! Here's what you can do.

### TIP #1

#### If you encounter a rattlesnake...

- Stop! Rattlesnakes respond to motion and vibration. They don't see or hear very well.
- Slowly back away to a safe distance, at least 6 and ideally 10 feet away.
- Respect warning signals. If you hear rattling or hissing, give the sound a wide berth.
- If a snake seems to be coming toward you, they may be trying to escape. Help them out by getting out of their way.
- Don't try to capture or handle a snake.
- If a rattlesnake is in your home or yard, ask the city or a local snake relocater to relocate it.

### TIP #2

#### Make your yard/house unattractive to snakes

- Remove potential snake hiding places, such as debris and junk piles.
- Stack firewood on a rack at least 1 ft off the ground, and away from your house.
- Seal any cracks and crevices that could offer entry into your house, for snakes or rodents.
- Use natural ways to keep mice away (see our factsheet on rodents), as snakes are attracted by rodents

### TIP #3

#### Be aware of your surroundings

- Move cautiously near areas preferred by snakes, such as rock outcrops, downed trees and logs, water's edge, and bases of shrubs.
- Look before placing your hands and feet.
- If you can't see, use a long stick to disturb vegetation and hidden animals.
- Wear gloves when moving rocks or brush.
- Wear sturdy shoes, not sandals, when hiking or doing yardwork.

### TIP #4

#### Keep dogs safe

- Leash your dog when hiking during snake season.
- Train your dog to avoid snakes. Dogs must learn to stay away and walk away from snakes, rather than sniff, play, or pursue. Consider snake avoidance training that uses behavioral rewards rather than shock collars.
- If your dog uses the yard, construct rattlesnake exclusion fencing: a 4 ft high smooth metal sheet (or very fine hardware cloth) with a buried footing.

### TIP #5

#### If you or your pet is bitten...

- Back away from the snake.
- Remove constricting items such as jewelry or your pet's collar, as swelling can cut off circulation.
- Stay still and keep the bite area level with the heart.
- Don't use tourniquets, don't put ice on the bite, and don't try to suck or cut the venom out.
- Go immediately to a hospital or veterinarian (call and ask if the vet stocks antivenom): anti-venom is the only effective treatment.

## NEED HELP?

To report and relocate a rattlesnake, call 311 or contact the city's Animal Welfare Department (505-768-2000).