

# MAFES Dawg Tracks

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MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™  
MS AGRICULTURAL AND  
FORESTRY EXPERIMENT STATION

*Safety Tips: Identify &  
Protection from Snakes*

I don't like snakes, not even to view them in pictures, and for sure not in real life. However, it is necessary to talk about them occasionally to keep us aware of the identity, characteristics, and protection.

According to [www.realworldsurvivor.com](http://www.realworldsurvivor.com), there are 7,000 venomous snake bites each year in the USA. If you happen to get bitten by one of these "Mr. No-Shoulders," you have a 99% (or better) chance of surviving. The reason being that 50% of the bites are dry, meaning there is no venom in them. From the link, [www.wildlifemgt.com](http://www.wildlifemgt.com), experts state that your chance of getting bitten by a poisonous snake is lower than getting struck by lightning. Nevertheless, we shall discuss tips for protection and identification. First, we shall examine some tips on how to prevent them from being around your property:

- ✓ Clean up debris, clutter, and hiding spots around your property.
- ✓ Wear boots and long pants in thick grassy and wooded areas.
- ✓ Walk and watch carefully in the areas where snakes might be nesting and resting.

Most poisonous snakes in the U.S. are in the pit viper group. They can be identified by:

- ~Pits on the head                      ~Vertical pupils
- ~A triangular head                 ~Slim neck
- ~A heavy body with a single set of scales on the underside of their tail.

The pit viper group is made up of the copperheads and cottonmouths and two major categories of rattlesnakes. All the pit vipers vibrate their tails rapidly to make noise when they are threatened. Cottonmouths and copperheads are often referred to as moccasins, but they are two distinct categories within the pit viper group.

Following are some characteristics of the ones that we might see in Mississippi:

**Rattlesnakes-** There are many varieties that have pit viper characteristics:

- ✓ Buttons on their tails plus 2-4 segments of rattles each year.
- ✓ Sizes range from 15 to 72 inches in length.
- ✓ The record is 96 inches on an Eastern Diamondback.

**Copperheads-** There are five categories of copperheads that have pit viper characteristics:

- ✓ Bands of brown, copper, or red on a tan body.
- ✓ Sizes range from 20 to 36 inches in length.
- ✓ Regional differences are identified by color and size.
- ✓ All have a bright yellow tip on their tail.
- ✓ The largest copperhead seen was 56 inches in length.

**Cottonmouth-** The cottonmouth is semi-aquatic with the pit viper characteristics:

- Adults have a solid-colored upper body that is olive, brown, or black with a lighter colored underside.
- Sometimes it is hard to differentiate between a cottonmouth and a non-poisonous water snake.
- Water snakes will leave when threatened while cottonmouths will raise their heads and confront their enemy with fangs showing inside a cotton-white mouth.
- Sizes range from 30 to 48 inches; the largest on record is 74 inches.

In south Mississippi you can find coral snakes which have:

- ✓ Distinct markings of red and black stripes, separated by a yellow tail.
- ✓ Been confused at times with the non-venomous scarlet king snake, which has yellow bands with red and black bands together.
- ✓ Oval heads and round pupils-unlike vipers.
- ✓ A very toxic venom, but they aren't aggressive.

According to the snake "gurus," very few snakes are aggressive. Even when a cottonmouth is swimming toward you, it is more out of curiosity than aggression. They also state that snakes can only strike within two-thirds of the length of their body, so a three-foot snake could reach about two feet.

### **IDENTIFY SNAKE BITES-**

If you are bitten by snake (hope you never are) you should be familiar with what type it is.

- Venomous snakes will leave two distinct puncture wounds.
- Non-venomous snakes may leave marks that resemble scratch marks.

### **IN CASE OF A BITE-**

If you are bitten by a venomous snake:

- Get to a hospital as quickly as possible.
- If there is a delay in getting to a hospital, wrap a constricting band between the bite and the heart to slow down the flow of blood, but not so tight as to cut off the blood flow completely.
- Do not apply a tourniquet.
- Your best alternative is to rush to the hospital, if possible, rather than waste time with first aid.
- With dogs and other pets, try to get them to a veterinary clinic ASAP.
- Be extra careful with small snakes as they are harder to identify than the adults and usually inject more venom.

### **OTHER PRECAUTIONS, IN CASE OF A BITE-**

- If the snake is still in the area, don't try to kill or catch it, unless it poses a danger to you or the victim. Try to remember what it looks like so you can help identify it from pictures in the emergency room.
- Remove all items that might restrict circulation, such as jewelry, gloves, or shoes that could be a problem as the bite begins to swell.
- Immobilize the area as much as possible and keep the bite slightly below level of the head.
- If swelling occurs, place a one-inch constricting band two inches above the bite. The tension should be so that you can slip a finger under it.

### **DON'T:**

- Don't give food or drink (obviously-no alcohol).
- Place the bite in ice.
- Make any cuts or attempts to suck out the venom.
- Attempt to administer or give anti-venom.
- Administer pain or anti-anxiety medications.

**FOR HELP- CALL THE REGIONAL POISON CONTROL CENTER @ (601) 354-7660**

***IF YOU SEE A SNAKE- KILL IT!!  
DON'T WAIT FOR A COMMITTEE!***