

OSHA FactSheet

Protect Yourself! Workers may be exposed to Cottonmouth Snakes (Water Moccasin)

Also known as the water moccasin or stump-tailed moccasin, this dangerous semi-aquatic snake is a truly aggressive reptile that will stand its ground or even approach an intruder.

Identification

Cottonmouth snakes average 5-55 inches in length. The triangular shaped head is set off with distinct elliptical 'cat-eye' pupils. The adult snake's skin is dark tan, brown or nearly black, with vague black or dark brown crossbands; juveniles have a bold crossbanded pattern of brown and pink or orange, with a yellow tail.

Habitats

Cottonmouths frequent swamplands and pond, lake and stream borders, especially those with dense canopies. They frequently remain coiled near water, or on logs and stumps in water. Upon provocation, cottonmouths will coil, open their mouths to expose the white lining, and shake their tails. They are highly defensive and not inclined to get out of one's way. Cottonmouths tend to latch on during a bite rather than the quick strike-and-release pattern of its cousin the Copperhead.

Snake Bite Prevention

- Be cautious about where your hands and feet are placed. Do not put your hands in holes or under objects (i.e., lumber, scrap metal, overturned boats) without first being sure that a snake is not located underneath.
- Do not sit or lay down in vegetation or other situations where there may be any doubt about the presence of snakes.
- Wear proper foot gear, such as hightop leather boots and leather gloves when handling materials mentioned above.
- Do not attempt to capture, tease or handle venomous snakes. Involuntary nervous activity



Photo: snakesandfrogs.com

- may allow snakes to bite for up to an hour after they appear to have been "killed."
- A snake's striking distance is about $\frac{1}{2}$ the total length of the snake.

Snake Bite Treatment

- The first step in snakebite treatment is to avoid panic. Keep bite victims still and calm to slow the spread of venom in case the snake is poisonous. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- If bitten, note the color and shape of the snake to help with treatment.
- Do not cut the wound or attempt to suck out the venom. Never allow the victim to drink alcohol.
- Apply first aid: lay the person down so that the bite is below the level of the heart and cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

For more complete information:



U.S. Department of Labor

www.osha.gov

(800) 321-OSHA

DSG 10/2005