

# Snakes of the PNW

## General Guidelines:

Luckily, Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana really aren't known for things that can kill you, and this includes snakes. The only venomous snake in the PNW is the rattlesnake, and any rattlesnakes you see here are either Western rattlesnakes, or subspecies of the western rattlesnake.

## Rattle snake:

The only rattlesnake species in Washington State is the Western rattlesnake. The western rattlesnake likes warm, dry habitats of desert shrub, grasslands, and open pine forests. Because of these habitat requirements, there are no rattlesnakes in Western Washington, only here in the eastern half of the state. This same species lives in Oregon, with two different subspecies in different areas. Idaho and Montana also have this type of rattlesnake, also with different subspecies.

The most important thing to remember about these snakes is that they would much rather remain still and go unnoticed by predators and people than draw attention and attack.



*Figure 1 Western rattlesnake, photo by Brad Moon*

Identification: Western rattlesnakes blend well with their environments. In forested areas they are dark with large blotches, in open deserts and prairies they are lighter with smaller blotches. All rattlesnakes have the telltale rattle at the end of their tail, but if you are close enough to see that, you are dangerously too close.

Precautions: It is important to always keep in mind that rattlesnakes will only strike if

cornered or provoked. If given space, they will retreat rather than fight. Snakes hibernate during the fall and winter months, and most snake bites occur between April and October, when both snakes and people are the most active outdoors. Here is a list of precautions to help you avoid a snake bite:

- Wear over-the-ankle hiking boots, thick socks, and loose-fitting long pants. Never go barefoot or wear sandals when hiking.
- Stick to the trails when hiking, and try to avoid tall grasses or heavy underbrush where snakes may hide during the day.
- Don't put hands or feet anywhere that you can't see where it's going to land.
- Be aware when climbing rocks or gathering firewood.

- Rattlesnakes can swim, so just be aware and try not to grab any twigs or sticks while swimming.
- If you hear a rattlesnake, stop, and slowly back away from the noise. Don't make any sudden or threatening movements.
- A dead rattlesnake can still inject venom after it has been killed. Don't touch or handle dead snakes.

First Aid:

**DON'T**

If bitten by a rattlesnake **DO NOT:**

- Do not make incisions over the bite wound.
- Do not restrict blood flow by applying a tourniquet.
- Do not ice the wound.
- Do not suck the poison out with your mouth.

These methods can very well cause additional harm and most amputations or other serious results of a rattlesnake bite are a result of icing or applying a tourniquet.

**DO**

- Stay calm
- Call Dispatch via radio or 911
- Wash the bite area gently with soap and water if available
- Remove watches, rings, etc., which may constrict swelling
- Immobilize the affected area
- Keep the bite below the heart if possible
- Transport safely to the nearest medical facility immediately.

Rattlesnakes vs. Bull snakes: In Washington state, there is another type of snake called the Bull snake. This snake is a constrictor snake, and spends most of its time in animal burrows. But, because it often postures, coils, and strikes out like a rattlesnake would, not to mention that it vibrates the end of its tail in brush to mimic the noise a rattlesnake makes, the bull snake is often mistaken for the rattlesnake. Just try to avoid both, the same precautions listed above apply to all snakes in the PNW.



# Spiders and Other Insects of the PNW

## General Guidelines:

### Tips for preventing spider bites:

- Shake out and check clothing and shoes for spiders before putting them on
- If a spider gets on you, brush it off. Don't crush it. Bites typically occur when a spider is squished or pressed up against our skin.
- Stay on the trail, because frequent foot traffic usually keeps spiders away.
- Never reach over or under anything you can't see.
- If you need to move a log or pile of debris (leaves, vegetation etc) or a rock, do it with a stick and not your hand.

## Yellow Sac:



Despite the name, yellow sac spiders are not usually yellow. These spiders are mainly garden-dwellers in the warm season, but sometimes make their way inside during the cooler autumn months (like most spiders and other bugs). Bites are rare, and occur only when the spider is trapped against the skin. The bite is painful, but not deadly.

Identification: This is a small spider, only about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch long. It is pale beige to yellow color and often has a tinge of green. The fangs and legs are dark brown, which gives the appearance of having dark brown feet.

## Black Widow:

Black widows are the most infamous of all spiders in the United States. With their unique coloring and poisonous bite, they are what gives other spiders a bad name. These spiders like to build their webs in-between objects; usually in woodpiles, under eaves, fences, and other areas where there is undisturbed debris. Their bite is painful, but not usually deadly.

Identification: Female black widow spiders are usually shiny black with a red hourglass marking under their belly. This mark can also be yellowish-orange and can be in the shape of an hourglass, two marks, or a single dot.



## Hobo Spider:

These spiders are sometimes mistaken for brown recluse spiders. (Note: currently, the northwest does not have brown recluse spiders.) Unlike the black widow and the yellow sac spider, this spider can be aggressive, even when not provoked. Their bites are not fatal, but they can be painful.



Identification: The abdomen of the hobo spider is oval-shaped and mottled with various shades of brown and gray. On the top of the abdomen there is a herringbone pattern. This pattern is a series of pale 'V' or triangle-shaped markings. Turning the spider over, you should see that the sternum (underside of the cephalothorax) has a solid, pale stripe running down the center of it.

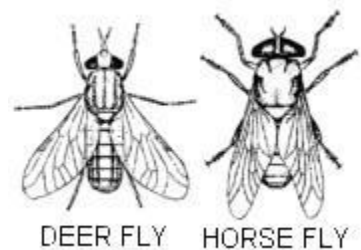
## Horse Fly/ Deer Fly:

These insects are usually only a problem during the summer months. These flies are bloodsucking insects that slice the skin of their victim and drink from the blood pool that is created. The females of both of these insects are active during the day. They are attracted by movement, shiny surfaces, carbon dioxide, and warmth. Bites can be painful, and there is potential that some people will have allergic reactions to their saliva. The males of both species feed on nectar and are not a problem for humans or animals.

Identification: Horse flies range in size from 3/4 to 1-1/4 inches long and usually have clear or solidly colored wings and brightly colored eyes. Deer flies, which commonly bite humans, are smaller with dark bands across the wings and colored eyes similar to those of horse flies.

Prevention: When outside during the summer months, repellents such as Deet or Off can provide protection. Wearing light clothing may help as well.

Treatment: While bites can be painful and itchy, there are usually no other, worse side effects. First aid type skin creams such as Benadryl may help relieve pain, and an ice pack if necessary should reduce swelling. Neosporin or something similar will help to keep infection away.



## Mosquitos:

Mosquitoes are small, midge-like flies that use their proboscis to suck the blood of their victims. They like to travel in swarms and are the bane of many campsites and backyards during the summer. While their bite is not dangerous (just annoying), the biggest problem is that they can transfer diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and now the zika virus as well. This is rare however, especially here in the PNW.



Prevention: Light colored clothing, tight weaves, and long sleeves are your best bet for avoiding these insects. Deet works well too, or Off. There are also many old wives tales on how to repel mosquitos, such as dryer sheets in your pocket. Mosquitos are attracted to sweat, so be aware of that.

Treatment: Benadryl cream to stop itching, a cool pack for bad swelling. Sometimes a paste of baking soda and water can help.

## Spider References:

Hobo spiders: <http://www.spiders.us/species/eratigena-agrestis/>

Spiders of Washington: <http://www.spiders.us/species/filter/washington/>

Tips while hiking: <http://www.yourhikeguide.com/spiders-scorpions-ticks/>

CDC venomous spider info: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/spiders/>

Mosquitos: <http://www.backpacker.com/skills/first-aid/how-to-avoid-mosquito-bites/>

Horseflies and deer flies: <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef511>

## Snake References:

Washington rattlesnakes: <http://burkemuseum.blogspot.com/2011/03/q-where-are-rattlesnakes-found-in.html#.V2lkqfkrKM8>

Oregon rattlesnakes:

[http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/rattlesnakes\\_in\\_oregon/#.V2lIGPkrKM8](http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/rattlesnakes_in_oregon/#.V2lIGPkrKM8)

Rattlesnake safety: [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5393596.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5393596.pdf)

Venomous snakes by state:

[http://www.venombyte.com/venom/snakes/venomous\\_snakes\\_by\\_state.asp](http://www.venombyte.com/venom/snakes/venomous_snakes_by_state.asp)

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Washington snakes: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/snakes.html>