



Murdoch University's 7 ways to keep your pets safe from snakebites this summer

Summer is when snakes become active and are more likely to come in contact with your pet. Here are some tips from Murdoch University vet Dr Katrin Swindells on how to keep your pet safe during snake season:



1. Snake-proof your property.

Many snakebites happen in backyards, particularly near bushland or in new developments where bushland is being cleared. To make your property less attractive to snakes, clear thick undergrowth and long grass around your home. Snakes are attracted to areas with rats and mice, so take steps to keep rodents away from your property. If you have bird aviaries, cave in any burrows that are formed, as snakes can use these to get into aviaries.



2. Keep your pets away from snakes.

If you have a cat, try to keep them inside or in outdoor enclosures, which are becoming increasingly common. If you have a dog, try to keep them on a leash when you're walking. If this isn't possible, pay close attention to the area you're walking through. Keep your dog close to you if there is long grass, you're around lakes that have a lot of frogs, or you're in an area known to have a lot of snakes. Pay attention if your dog starts to bark at something, or if your dog or cat starts to chase something at your home, or at a reserve.



3. Act immediately – don't wait for symptoms.

If your dog or cat has been in contact with a snake, take it to your vet to be assessed immediately. Unlike when people are bitten by snakes, your pet may not show any obvious signs of a snakebite. They might not be in pain and the bite may not be visible at all, or may look like a minor scratch. Symptoms of envenomation can take less than an hour to show, and by that time it may be too late – so get help straight away. Some envenomated animals may take 12-24 hours to show signs.



4. Watch for unusual behavior.

While many snakebites can initially go undetected, your dog or cat may show some symptoms if they were bitten by a highly venomous snake. Some pets will show symptoms known as pre-paraletic signs such as periods of wobbliness, collapsing, inappropriate urination or defecation or vomiting. Get them to your vet or emergency centre immediately.



5. Try to identify the snake, but don't kill it.

If the snake is dead, take it to the vet with you to help your vet determine the right kind of anti-venom to treat your pet. If you don't know what kind of snake may have bitten your pet, your vet can run tests. If the snake is still alive, don't kill it. This is illegal, and puts your own safety at risk at a time when your pet needs your full attention.



6. Know basic pet first aid.

The most important thing to do if your dog or cat has been bitten by a snake is to get them to a vet immediately. In some cases, your dog or cat may stop breathing before you arrive at your vet or emergency centre – so you may need to perform mouth-to-nose resuscitation on the way. Don't use pressure bandages on your pet. While humans are often bit on their limbs, animals are usually bitten around their head, neck, shoulders and chest – so any type of pressure bandage could interfere with their breathing.



7. Be prepared for emergencies.

If your dog or cat is bitten by a snake, treatments using anti-venom from your vet could be life-saving. Anti-venom can be costly, ranging from around \$300 up to \$2000 for each vial depending on the type. Unfortunately sometimes the costs of anti-venom mean that not all owners can afford to get the treatment their dog or cat needs – but having an emergency plan for your pet, such as pet insurance, could make all the difference.

Find out what to do if you find a snake at your home and some facts to help you understand snake behavior.