

# North Carolina's Venomous Snakes

presented by North Carolina Poison Control

Call NC Poison Control if you are bitten by a snake: 1-800-222-1222.\*

\*If a snakebite victim is having chest pain, difficulty breathing, face swelling or has lost consciousness, call 9-1-1 immediately.

## Venomous vs. Poisonous: What's the Difference?

The short answer is that all venomous animals are poisonous.<sup>1</sup> This is the reason people call poison control centers for help with bites and stings.

**Venomous** is a specific word meaning that an animal has a venom gland and a way to introduce the venom it produces (fangs).<sup>2</sup>

**Poisonous** is a more general word meaning that a substance (sometimes venom or other toxins) can be harmful to a person's organs or tissues.

"Venomous" and "poisonous" are sometimes interchanged when talking about snakes with venom. While venomous is the more precise term, both terms are accurate.

## How many venomous snakes live in North Carolina?

There are six types of venomous snakes that live in North Carolina:

- copperhead snake
- cottonmouth snake
- eastern diamondback rattlesnake
- pigmy rattlesnake
- timber rattlesnake
- coral snake rattlesnake

This poster only features the first five, however, because the coral snake is so rare in North Carolina. In fact, North Carolina Poison Control hasn't had a call about a coral snake bite in over 25 years.

## Which venomous snake is most common in North Carolina?

The copperhead is the most common venomous snake in North Carolina. North Carolina Poison Control receives 10 times the number of calls about copperhead bites than all other snake bites combined.

## Why call North Carolina Poison Control for a snake bite?

Here's why you should call us:

- Snake bites are poisonings, and treating poisonings is our job.
- We can help you know whether antivenom is needed. Not all snake bites require antivenom.
- Our nurses, doctors, and pharmacists have years of experience and training managing snake bites.
- Other doctors and nurses call us to help treat their snake-bitten patients.
- If you need to be hospitalized, our assistance will continue during hospitalization and after discharge.

To order a free snake pack from North Carolina Poison Control, visit [www.PoisonShop.org](http://www.PoisonShop.org).

For more information about snake identification, visit [www.HerpsOfNC.org](http://www.HerpsOfNC.org).

You can reach North Carolina Poison Control for help with any kind of poisoning, including snake bites, by calling 1-800-222-1222.

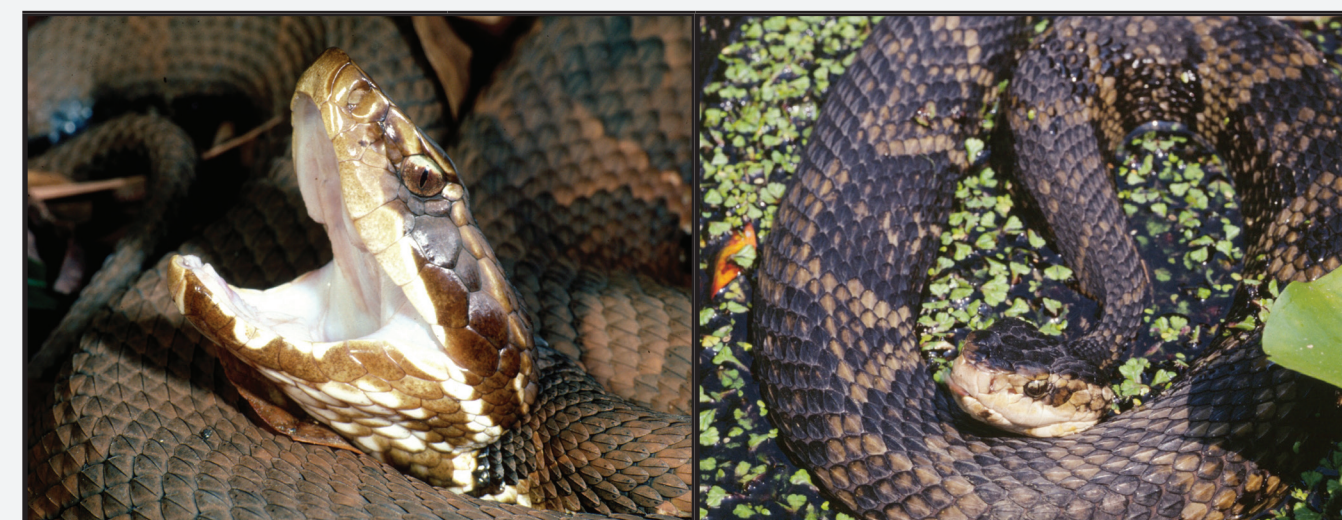
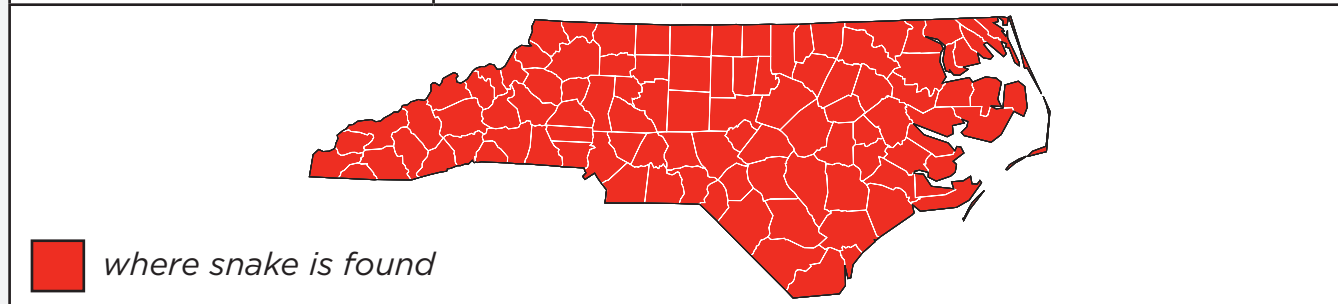
Save the number into your phone for quick and easy access.

Maps and snake pictures courtesy of Davidson College Herpetology Lab. North Carolina Poison Control would like to credit the following resource for aiding in the content development of this poster: Dorcas, Michael E. *A Guide to the Snakes of North Carolina*. Charlotte: Belk Printing, 2004.

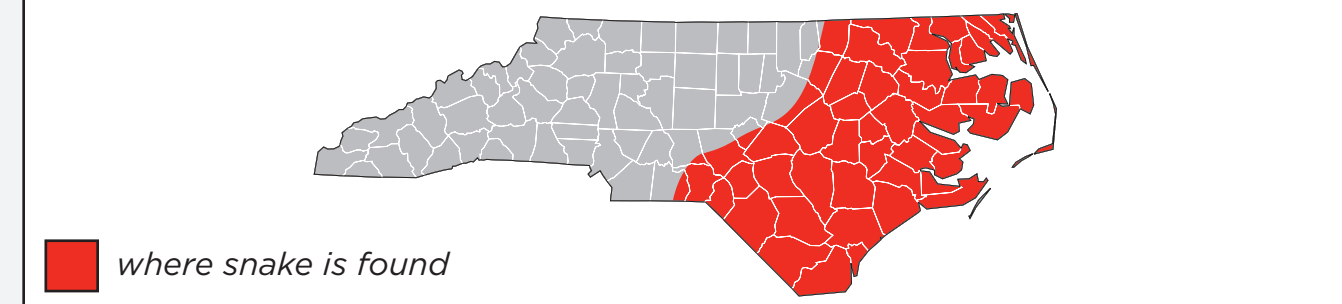
<sup>1</sup> Russell, Findlay E. *Snake Venom Poisoning*. New York: Scholium International, Inc., 1980.  
<sup>2</sup>White, Julian and Richard Dart. *Snakebite A Brief Medical Guide*. Lancaster, PA: Cadmus, 2008.



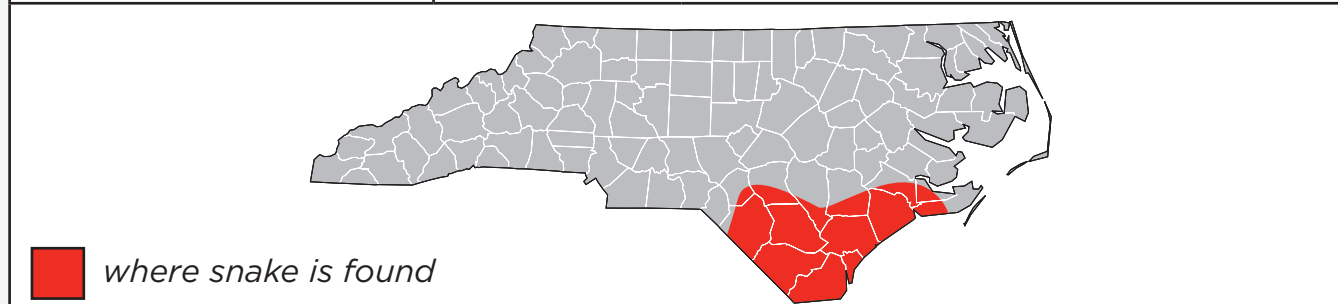
Copperhead <i>Agkistrodon contortrix</i>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	dark brown, hour-glass shaped pattern <i>Young copperheads have yellow or green tails.</i>
<b>Typical adult length</b>	2-3 feet
<b>Habitat</b>	everywhere
<b>Defenses</b>	camouflaging, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
<b>Bite severity</b>	Copperhead bites can be severe but generally not as bad as other North Carolina snakes. About half of all copperhead bites result in only mild swelling and pain.



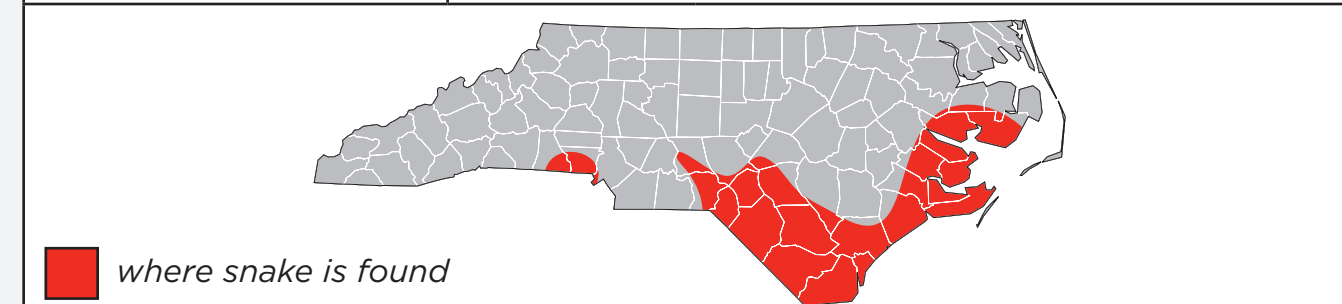
Cottonmouth also known as a Water Moccasin <i>Agkistrodon piscivorus</i>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	dark bands on dark or olive skin, white inside of mouth <i>Young cottonmouths are lighter and look similar to copperheads.</i>
<b>Typical adult length</b>	3 feet
<b>Habitat</b>	prefers freshwater but can also be found on land
<b>Defenses</b>	camouflaging, fleeing, opening the mouth widely, flattening the body to appear bigger, vibrating the tail, releasing musk, biting
<b>Bite severity</b>	Cottonmouth bites have about the same level of severity as copperhead bites.



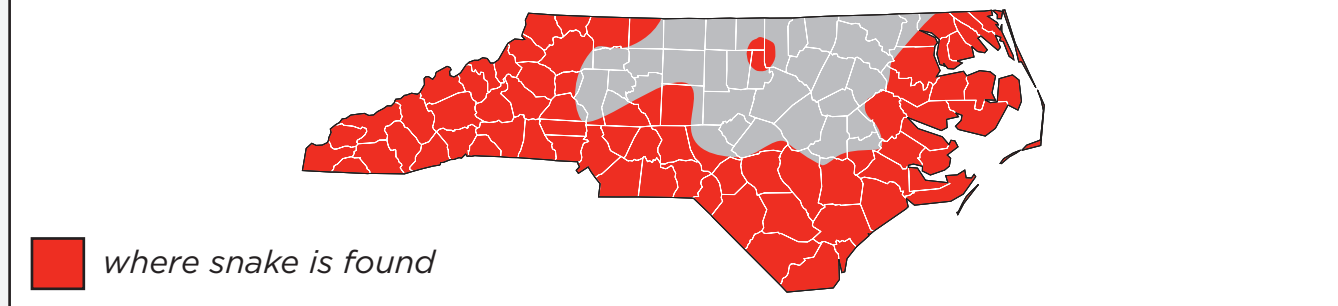
Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake <i>Crotalus adamanteus</i>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	dark diamond pattern outlined in black on gray or yellowish skin, rattle
<b>Typical adult length</b>	4-5 feet
<b>Habitat</b>	sandy, coastal areas
<b>Defenses</b>	camouflaging, fleeing, rattling their tail (sometimes)
<b>Bite severity</b>	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Pigmy Rattlesnake <i>Sistrurus miliarius</i>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	dark spotted pattern on gray, pinkish, or red skin, rattle
<b>Typical adult length</b>	1-2 feet
<b>Habitat</b>	forests
<b>Defenses</b>	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes), which can sound like a buzz
<b>Bite severity</b>	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



Timber Rattlesnake also known as a Canebrake <i>Crotalus horridus</i>	
<b>Characteristics</b>	varies in color, dark bands on a lighter skin, rattle <i>Coastal varieties have a brown or orange "racing stripe."</i>
<b>Typical adult length</b>	4 feet
<b>Habitat</b>	forests
<b>Defenses</b>	camouflaging, rattling their tail (sometimes)
<b>Bite severity</b>	Bites from rattlesnakes are usually more severe than bites from copperheads and are a medical emergency.



## Common Non-venomous Snakes

*It's safest to consider all snakes as potentially dangerous.*



Some snakes may be in different color shades than shown in these pictures.