



Wheat Ridge
Veterinary Specialists

Expertise You Can Trust.



emergency & critical care

internal medicine

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dermatology

radiology, ultrasound & CT scan

Rattlesnake Envenomation



Rattlesnake bites are unfortunately a fairly common occurrence in the Summer months in Colorado. The prairie rattlesnake, *Crotalus viridis viridis*, lives amongst us in the nearby foothills and open plains. Hotbeds for rattlesnakes in our local area include Green Mountain, Table Mountain, and Morrison/Red Rocks. However, rattlesnake bites have been documented anywhere in Colorado below 8,500 feet between March and October.

If you and your pet encounter a rattlesnake, immediately put your pet on leash and leave the area slowly. If you see your pet get bitten by a rattlesnake, seek veterinary attention IMMEDIATELY. Do not attempt to apply any tourniquets or ice to the bite wound, as they can cause further damage and delay emergency veterinary treatment. Do NOT attempt to suck the venom from the bite. Simply get your pet to the car and drive! Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital is equipped to provide the most recent state-of-the-art emergency veterinary care, including intravenous fluids, pain medication, and antivenin.

Clinical signs associated with prairie rattlesnake envenomation include swelling and pain at the site of the bite, weakness, lethargy, and bruising or bleeding. The majority of animals are bitten on their nose or face, but others may be bitten on the leg, throat, chest, or rear end. When you get to the hospital, the veterinary team will obtain a blood sample from your dog or cat to look at their red blood cells. Normally, your pet's red blood cells are round to oval in shape. With prairie rattlesnake envenomation, the red blood cells develop spikes or spicules that make them look like a sea urchin. These abnormal red blood cells, or echinocytes, will usually develop within 30 minutes of a rattlesnake bite.

The most important treatments for prairie rattlesnake envenomation are the administration of intravenous fluids and pain medication to treat shock. Other therapies include antihistamines, steroids, and antibiotics may also aid in your pet's treatment by decreasing swelling and preventing infection. At Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital, antivenin is available, and has been shown to decrease swelling around the bite site and decrease length of hospital stay. Many medium- to large-breed dogs can survive rattlesnake envenomation without antivenin treatment; however, usually swelling and pain continue for longer than 24 hours, thus increasing the length of time that they are required to stay within the hospital. Our experienced veterinary staff will offer various forms of treatment and help determine what is best for you and your pet. With rapid and aggressive treatment, more than 98% of dogs in Colorado survive to tell "The Tale of the Rattler".

After treatment, your pet may be sent home on antibiotics and pain medications for the next week, until the swelling and bite wounds have healed. Watch them carefully for signs of not eating, swelling, pain or pus from the bite, weakness, lethargy, bruising, or collapse. If any of these signs occur, please contact Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital immediately.

Being curious creatures, many dogs don't remember or associate a bite with the snake. Rattlesnake aversion classes are sometimes successful in helping your pet associate their bite with that slithery rattler, to help prevent future bites and trips to our hospital. If you are interested in looking into rattlesnake aversion classes, we'd be happy to provide you with information.

OUR HOSPITAL IS NEVER CLOSED. THE EMERGENCY SERVICE AT WHEAT RIDGE ANIMAL HOSPITAL IS HERE TO SERVE YOU AND YOUR PET 24 HOURS A DAY, 365 DAYS A YEAR.

Wheat Ridge Veterinary Specialists

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