

Rattlesnake Vaccine for Canines

Yes it really exists, and yes it really works



Fanny before being bit by a rattlesnake.
She was not vaccinated.



Fanny two days after being bit.
She is hardly recognizable as a dog

In eleven full seasons of wingshooting no gundog has ever been bit by a rattlesnake while hunting at Rock Springs Ranch. It's when the work is over and the dogs are back home relaxing in their own yards that they get into trouble.

For the past two years all of the Rock Springs Ranch gundogs have been vaccinated for rattlesnake bite — with the exception of GSP Fanny who arrived at the ranch just after the shots had been completed. In March 2004 Fanny was playing in the yard with several other dogs when she, the only dog not vaccinated, was the only dog to be bit. Her face swelled hideously, which is normal. Dog's faces may swell so much that they can't breathe unless they are given a steroid shot very shortly after the bite. Even after being given steroid shots and antivenin, their faces typically remain grossly swollen for more than a week. It takes months for their throats to return to normal. Often they have a baggy "double chin" for life.



Trigger one day after a rattlesnake bite in May. He had been vaccinated the year before and had a booster shot this spring. Antibodies produced as a result of the vaccine went to work immediately to neutralize the rattlesnake venom.

This May, Chef Afif's GSP Trigger went outside to play and returned more quickly than usual. Afif examined Trigger and found two rather large fang marks on his nose that were oozing fluid and a lump that was visibly swelling. Since it was a weekend and there were no local veterinary offices open Trigger had to go on a nearly 2 hour car ride for treatment in Santa Cruz. A two hour wait is sometimes fatal. At best, the swelling will be so advanced that

having breathing difficulties and will be in extreme pain. Trigger arrived at the Vet's office standing up, looking out the window and wagging his tail; unlike unvaccinated dogs who usually arrive immobile, in quiet agony and must be carried into the vet's office. Trigger's swelling was so minor that a steroid shot was unnecessary. The next day he had minor puffiness. His eyes were open—rather than swollen shut. His neck looked a little jowly, but nothing you would notice if you didn't know him. He still looked like a GSP, unlike Fanny, whose face was so swollen she was unrecognizable.

What is Rattlesnake Vaccine?

Crotalus Atrox Toxioid is made using Western Diamondback rattlesnake venom. After vaccination a dog produces antibodies that will begin neutralizing rattlesnake venom immediately if the dog is bit. Antibody levels in a recently vaccinated dog are comparable to up to three vials of antivenin. Antivenin costs \$500 per vial and is in increasingly short supply. The vaccine costs from \$18 to \$25 per shot. For dogs under 100 pounds, two initial shots one month apart and an annual booster a month before rattlesnake season begins are required—a third initial shot is given to larger dogs.

The Hollister Veterinary Clinic estimates that treatment of a vaccinated dog that has been bit by a rattlesnake will be around \$400. Treatment of an unvaccinated dog that is bit by a rattlesnake will cost \$1500 to \$2000 or more depending on how many vials of antivenin are required. More importantly to many dog lovers, a vaccinated dog will experience less pain and will be at less risk of permanent injury.

Typical treatment for rattlesnake bite

Dogs that have not been vaccinated are given from one to several vials of antivenin, plus steroid shots to reduce swelling, and antibiotics to prevent infection.

Dogs that have been vaccinated are treated with steroid shots and antibiotics only—and in some cases, antibiotics only.

A rattlesnake bite always requires medical attention, even for a vaccinated dog. The vaccination will not prevent infection and the dog will need an antibiotic.

Red Rock Biologics

Rattlesnake Vaccine from Red Rock Biologics is made using venom from Western Diamondback rattlesnakes, but it will also provide some protection from other rattlesnakes including Sidewinders, Southwestern Speckled and Southern Pacific rattlesnakes. It does not protect against the Mojave green or the Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake or cottonmouths (also known as water-moccasins).

If your local veterinarian does not have rattlesnake vaccine, you can find more information at: www.redrockbiologics.com. Or call them toll free at 866-897-7525.



The Rattlesnake is the only poisonous snake found in California.

Snakes are active during late spring and summer and are never seen during most of the wingshooting season.



The harmless Gopher snake is often mistaken for a rattler.

Gopher snakes have a pointed tail rather than rattles and they have small heads unlike the rattler's large wedge shaped head.

Shannon Kelly made friends with this gopher snake during Summer Camp 2000.

Rattlesnake Trivia

A rattlesnake can only strike about the same distance as half of its length. The longest rattlesnake ever found at Rock Springs Ranch was a whopping 50 inches. Most are under 36 inches.

No one has ever been bit by a snake at Rock Springs Ranch. The majority of people who have been bit by rattlesnakes are intoxicated males under the age of 30. More than half of all bites occur when someone picks up a snake! The second most frequent reason snakes bite people is because they are stepped on. The third most common reason for snake bite is from reaching into an area you cannot see.

Rattlesnakes bite to defend themselves. Venom takes energy to produce and they prefer to conserve it. They will normally try to warn you off by rattling and hissing, but may strike quickly if you startle them when they are mating, giving birth, or shedding.

King Snakes are Harmless



There are two kinds of King Snakes on the ranch:

At left is a red/black & white king (which can also be red/black and yellow) and on the right is a black and white king (which can also be dark brown and cream colored). All of these snakes are beautiful and harmless.

If you spot a rattlesnake that is not rattling, back away slowly; rattlers strike at fast moving objects and they *can* move very fast. If you hear but don't see a rattlesnake STOP immediately. Agitated snakes may strike at anything that moves. Find the snake and let him settle down. When he stops rattling slowly move away.

To avoid snakebite, watch where you step and put your hands, and never pick up a snake (especially if you are an intoxicated male under the age of 30) -- but don't become paranoid. Rattlers usually run from you if they can.