

## Rattlesnake Bites

### Pertinent Information

- Crotalids (rattlesnakes) have long, hinged, tube like fangs that can voluntarily inject venom when they strike (juvenile or baby snakes have the greatest likelihood of injecting large quantities of venom when they bite)
- Crotalid venom is typically hemotoxic (toxic to the blood), necrotizing (will kill off the tissue surrounding the bite), anticoagulant (prevents clotting of the blood), and can be neurotoxic (depending on the species of snake)

### Clinical Signs and Diagnosis

- Clinical signs of rattlesnake bites
  - Severe tissue damage that spreads from the site of the bite
  - Bloody fluid oozing from the bite site
  - Acute swelling around the area of the bite
- Diagnosis
  - Diagnosis will include consideration of the clinical signs, presence of fang marks, and identification of the snake (when possible)
  - A coagulation test may be performed to determine the severity of the coagulopathy (inability of the blood to clot due to envenomation)

### Treatment

- First Aid after Bite
  - Keep pet quiet and calm (do not allow pet to run around)
  - Bring pet into veterinarian or emergency clinic as soon as possible
  - **DO NOT** use ice, cold water, sprays, tourniquets, or hot packs on the bite wound
- Treatment at Clinic
  - If pet is seen within 6 hours of being bitten, antivenom can be administered effectively
  - Often, pets require hospitalization with IV fluids, injectable medication, and wound care to prevent shock, tissue loss, and reactivation of the snake venom
  - Hospital treatment is geared towards reducing shock, minimizing tissue necrosis, preventing coagulopathy, and preventing secondary infection
  - Hospitalization can last 1-5 days depending on the severity of the bite and the size of the patient

### Post Bite Care at Home

- The most important part of post-snake bite care is to keep your pet calm for 2-4 weeks after treatment
  - This will prevent the reactivation of the snake venom, which can cause a severe allergic reaction than may result in death
- Give all medications as prescribed by the veterinarian
- Consider the use of cold laser therapy to minimize tissue loss, reduce swelling, and promote healing of the area
  - Healing and regeneration of tissue after a snake bite can take up to 3 months to fully heal
- Your veterinarian will want to see your pet back at regular intervals after hospitalization to ensure your pet is healing well and to ensure proper function of internal organs