

The Six Venomous Snakes of Florida

Florida is home to a large variety of wildlife, from the iconic north American alligator and Florida panther to the tiny Key deer. Among these creatures, 44 different species of snake also make their home in Florida. Of these 44 species, only six are venomous.

This guide is a quick reference to the six venomous snakes that reside in Florida. By educating yourself, you be able to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Please note that venomous snakes are dangerous and deserve our respect and caution so under any circumstances do not approach them. If you or a loved one are bitten by a venomous snake or even a nonvenomous snake, however, please be sure to perform the following:

Do:

- Move the victim away from the snake
- Keep the victim calm
- Remove any jewelry, or in the case of pets, any collars that are near the snakebite
- Try to remember size, color, and shape of the snake

Don't:

- Don't cut open the snakebite
- Don't apply ice or heat
- Don't suck the venom out with your mouth
- Don't use drugs or alcohol; this will accelerate the venom through the body
- Don't apply a tourniquet to the bite

Emergency Contact:

- Contact the Venom Response- R. David Paulison Fire Rescue
Headquarters
9300 NW 41st Street, Miami, FL 33178
Phone number- 786-331-5000
- Phone your local hospital or fire department
- Or call all 9-1-1

Pygmy Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus miliarius*):

General Information- Pygmy rattlesnakes are the smallest venomous snake found in Florida; despite their small stature, the species can be very aggressive and according to reports from the University of Florida, it is the most commonly encountered venomous snake in the state. Though it has a rattle, it is not very loud due to its small size. When the pygmy snake is rattling a faint buzzing vibration can be heard.



Wikipedia Commons License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Appearance- Pygmy Snakes are predominantly gray in color with large black spots that cover its sides and back. Reddish-brown scales are also found running along the back.

Habitat- Pygmy snakes can be found near lakes, wetlands, flatwoods, and also in suburban neighborhoods and golf courses. They can be found everywhere in Florida with the exception of the Florida Keys.

Venom- Pygmy snakes produce a cytotoxic venom (a venom that attacks tissue by destroying cells). This can make pygmy rattlesnake bites very painful to both adults and children; in the case of the latter it can also cause death. Though it does not produce as much venom compared to its larger venomous cousins, all bites should be taken seriously.

Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake (*Crotalus adamanteus*):



Wikipedia Commons License: CC BY-SA 3.0

General information- The eastern diamondback rattlesnake is the largest rattlesnake that can be found in Florida. Though not aggressive, they will attack to defend themselves. The eastern diamondback rattlesnake can strike up to 2/3 their body length. Due to their striking length and venom they are considered the most dangerous venomous snake in North America. They will use their rattle as a warning to individuals who venture too close.

Appearance- The eastern diamondback rattlesnake has a “rough” looking appearance and are predominately brown with a diamond shape pattern along its back. The scales that make up the diamond are white and dark brown.

Habitat- The eastern diamondback rattlesnake can be found in flatwoods, forests, wetlands, and sometimes urban areas. They are located throughout Florida.

Venom- The venom of the eastern diamondback rattlesnake is a hemotoxin; hemotoxins is a toxins that targets red blood cells. It has a very powerful bite and the venom is very painful to both humans and animals. If bitten, get treatment right away as there is a 10-20% mortality rate.

Timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*):

General information-

The timber rattlesnake is the second largest venomous snake that can be found in Florida. It is also known as the Canebrake rattlesnake and its prey includes small mammals, frogs, birds, and even other snakes. They prefer not having confrontation but if threatened, they will use their rattle as a warning before attacking.



Image courtesy of the Kansas Herpetological Society

Appearance- The timber rattlesnake has a head that seems larger or more distinct from the rest of the body. The predominant colors are usually pinkish-gray, tan, or light brown. On the back there is a red-brown stripe that runs vertically across the body with black stripes across the back. The tail (rattle) is all black.

Habitat- Timber rattlesnakes can be found in wetlands, forests, cane thickets, riverbeds, damp bottomlands and in suburbs that were built in areas that were originally their homes. They can be located in Northern Florida.

Venom- While not an aggressive snake, timber rattlesnake venom is very powerful and can be lethal. The venom is a hemotoxin (a toxin which targets red blood cells), and if bitten an individual should seek medical help immediately.

Water Moccasin (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*):



Wikipedia Commons License: CC BY 2.0

General Information- The water moccasin is also commonly known as the Cottonmouth due to the milky white appearance of the mouth's interior. It is often confused with nonvenomous water snakes. There are several notable differences between moccasins and water (listed in the table below), but to be safe, please avoid all aquatic snakes:

Water Moccasin (venomous)	Water Snake (nonvenomous)
elliptical pupils	circular pupils
elevate their heads off the ground at an angle	water snakes do not elevate their heads at an angle
water moccasins will "rattle" their tail and perform a threat display	water snakes do not rattle their tails and will flee at first opportunity
If you stand directly above a water moccasin you will not be able to see their eyes	if you stand above a water snake you will be able to see their eyes

Appearance- Young and juvenile water moccasins look very different from their adult versions. Younger water moccasins have reddish brown or yellow scales with a sulfur-yellow tail. The adult version of a water moccasin has light brown scales with stripes of dark brown scales; these stripes can be faint or distinct. Sometimes adult water moccasins predominately have black scales. The interior of a water moccasin is a distinct milky white color.

Habitat- Water moccasins can usually be found in bodies of still water, like wetlands, marshes, ponds, lakes, and sometimes slow-moving rivers. They are located throughout Florida.

Venom- Water moccasins utilize a powerful hemotoxin in their venom. If not treated right away, death may occur in the worst cases or possible amputation of limbs.

Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix*):

General Information- Due to the similar coloration of Copperheads and young water moccasins, the two species are often confused for each other. Unlike other species of venomous snakes, when threatened Copperheads will freeze and expand their ribs so they appear to be flat against the ground. They will also release a stench and vibrate their tails to produce a warning vibration against would-be attackers and predators.



Image courtesy of the Public Health Image Library

Appearance- Copperheads are predominately light brown with dark brown or reddish-brown splotches that run across the body. They may also have a pink or orange hue.

Habitat- Copperheads can be found in the forests that run along damp areas (e.g. marshes, streams, and rivers). They prefer areas with fallen leaves, rocks, trunks, etc where they can ambush prey. Copperheads can be found in Northern Florida, particularly at and near the Apalachicola River.

Venom- Copperheads produce a hemotoxic venom; this type of venom attacks red blood cells. Of all the vipers, however, Copperheads have the lowest venom potency and will use a warning bite before attacking. Warning bites will have little to no venom. Due to the low venom potency, larger pets and healthy adults will be in pain, while smaller pets and children are at particular risk from lethal bites.

Coral Snake (*Micrurus fulvius*):



Wikipedia Commons License: CC BY-SA 3.0

General Information- The coral snake is one of the most distinctive venomous snakes that are found in Florida. It is not an aggressive snake and would rather run than attack. When threatened it will cover its head with their body and wave their tails in the air in order to keep its head safe and distract their attacker. Due to its coloration It is often confused with the nonvenomous scarlet snake. A way to remember the differences between the two species is the order of the stripes, as pictured below:



When the yellow bands are next to the red, then it is the venomous ("red and yellow kill a fellow")

Image courtesy of Jay Ondrecika / Shutterstock



If the black bands are next to red, it is the nonvenomous scarlet snake. ("red next to black, safe from attack")

Image courtesy of University of Georgia

Appearance- Unlike the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, coral snakes have a "smooth" appearance. Coral snakes are a slender snake species, with thin yellow stripes that alternate between thick patterns of red and black. If the yellow and red scales are touching, this is a telltale marker that the snake is a coral snake and not a nonvenomous scarlet snake.

Habitat- Coral snakes can be found in wetlands, forests and flatlands. It can be found all over Florida, except for the southernmost keys.

Venom- Coral snakes utilize a powerful neurotoxin (a type of toxin that affects the nervous system), however, because of its slender stature and small mouth they do not have a lot of venom in their fangs and it is difficult for a coral snake to pierce human skin. Regardless, if bitten one should see out medical attention as there is a 5–20% mortality rate.