

RATTLESNAKE LIFE SAVERS

A friend told me the other day that she saw the largest rattlesnake she had ever seen sunning itself on a rock. She said the snake was as big around as her wrist! Now that would be a big one for sure and it seems early in the year for the snakes to be a problem, but to be sure, they are around. Rattlesnakes can pose a life-threatening problem at times to your horse and to you. A few years ago while riding the hill behind our home, my wife's horse suddenly did a 180 degree turn and Lesley did a 90 degree turn, which landed her on the ground. The horse was responding to the sound of a rattlesnake using his rattles at full volume. Lucky for Lesley, she didn't land ON the snake, but it still took a long time before she could sit down comfortably.

Most horses if bitten get it on their legs. There is lots of swelling and sometimes some tissue death that can take a long time to recover. There is always pain as well. The big problem comes when they get bit on their nose while grazing.

Horses are built, anatomically speaking, such that they cannot breathe through their mouth. They only get air through their nose. When their nose starts to swell from the bite, it will easily swell so much that the swelling cuts off their air. Death from suffocation can occur in a short while. Most of us will never have that happen, but there is a good thing to pack in your medical kit while riding to make sure suffocation never does happen.

Pictured here are two sizes of tubing you can get at hardware stores. I cut them in about 1-foot lengths and then round the ends with a file to make them smooth. If your horse is bitten and the nose swells, just insert the tube into the nostril about half way to keep the airway open. You can tape the tube around the horse's nose or it will stay in place because of the swelling all by itself as the swelling increases. The tube may need to be left in for several days until the swelling goes down. The smaller tube will more easily fit a foal. If everyone carried these, you can borrow one from a fellow rider and have one for each nostril, but one will keep your horse alive. Easy, cheap, easy to carry—life saving.



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