

# Rattlesnake Pills Worse Than Snake Oil?



By Ruth Kava — December 20, 2017



Courtesy: pxhere.com

Ah, snake oil — the sobriquet we use to label a variety of fundamentally useless nostrums that are sold to the gullible to prevent, treat or cure a variety of ailments. Now we have another, genuinely snake-derived item, rattlesnake pills. These are composed of dehydrated ground up rattlesnake meat (sans the poison glands) and are supposedly used by those following Hispanic folklore to treat ills ranging from acne to cancer and HIV. But not only would these pills be useless for these purposes, but they could also be deadly — as suggested by a recent [notice](#) <sup>[1]</sup> from the CDC pointing to a case of Salmonella infection in a person in Kansas who had taken rattlesnake pills.

It's well-known that reptiles (even those cute little [turtles](#) <sup>[2]</sup> from the pet store) can carry Salmonella bacteria. And there have been previous problems with rattlesnake pills — in 1994 the deaths of 3 people in Los Angeles [were linked](#) <sup>[3]</sup> to rattlesnake pills contaminated with Salmonella. In the current case in Kansas, the strain of the bacteria that made the person ill was the same as that found in the pills.

There are many different strains of Salmonella that can cause human disease. The CDC has [estimated](#) <sup>[4]</sup> that there have been 1.2 million cases and 450 deaths from Salmonella disease (not counting the type that causes typhoid fever) annually in the U.S. Typically, a Salmonella infection causes fever and diarrhea, which is usually self-limiting, though it can take months for the bowels to become normal again. Some people also develop what is called reactive arthritis, which can be difficult to treat. And such infections can be fatal in the most vulnerable — infants and young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems.

One big problem with such folklore-based "treatments" is that there is no quality control over production methods — as we've noted in the past with other dietary supplements. We've certainly seen such problems again and again with nutritional supplements based on other folklore-sourced

systems, as we [recounted](#) <sup>[5]</sup> here.

So if you really have a yen to consume rattlesnake, avoid the pills and just go for the meat — but make sure it's properly treated (i.e., cooked) to eliminate the risk of bacterial contamination. Better yet, leave the snakes alone, after all, most other sources of meat don't have dangerous venom and the means of delivering it.

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**Links**

[1] <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/s1219-salmonella-rattlesnake-pills.html>

[2] <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/agbeni-08-17/index.html>

[3] <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/394207/SNAKE-PILLS-BLAMED-FOR-3-DEATHS.html>

[4] <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/general/index.html>

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2004/12/14/traditionalalternative-medications-can-be-dangerous>