

# Instead of Curing Cancer and Acne, Rattlesnake Pills Give You Salmonella



By Alex Berezow, PhD — May 3, 2018



Credit: Tigerhawkvok/Wikipedia <sup>[1]</sup>

One time when I was a little kid, our family visited Arizona. We went to a restaurant somewhere out in the desert that served fried rattlesnake. As you probably guessed, it tastes like chicken.

Rattlesnake meat is perfectly fine to consume. However, snakes and other [reptiles, as well as amphibians, can carry](#) <sup>[2]</sup> [Salmonella](#) <sup>[2]</sup>. That's why it's important for people to wash their hands after handling pet reptiles... or to cook them properly if you plan on eating them. The CDC reports on a person in Kansas who found that out the hard way.

Some people like to take "[rattlesnake pills](#) <sup>[3]</sup>." This dietary supplement, which according to the CDC contains "dehydrated and pulverized rattlesnake meat," is not approved by the FDA. Despite this, (literally) snake oil salesmen market the pills as cure-alls for everything from acne to cancer to HIV. Of course, you can find rattlesnake pills in any location that peddles alternative medicine and other "natural cures."

The Kansas patient recalls traveling to the State of Chihuahua in Mexico, where he purchased and consumed what he believed to be homemade rattlesnake pills. Consider the number of serious judgment errors that went into this decision:

1. The patient went to Chihuahua, a region that is currently under a [level 3 travel warning](#) <sup>[4]</sup> by the U.S. State Department due to violent crime and gangs. (A level 3 warning means people should "reconsider" traveling there; level 4 means people should not go at all.)
2. He purchased rattlesnake pills, which he wrongly believes confer some sort of miraculous health benefit.
3. He purchased homemade pills, because the best medicine is made in somebody's basement.

4. He ate them. Not just one, but five. (If one is healthy, five must be better, right?)

As the patient found out, there's actually nothing magical about a rattlesnake. Just because rattlesnakes are tough and cool doesn't mean that you'll be tough and cool if you eat them. Instead, you might just be a dope.

**Source** <sup>[5]</sup>: Bottichio L, Webb LM, Leos G, Tolar B, Dowell N, Basler C. "Notes from the Field: *Salmonella* Oranienburg Infection Linked to Consumption of Rattlesnake Pills — Kansas and Texas, 2017." *MMWR* 67 (17): 502-503. DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm6717a4.

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**Links**

[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rattlesnake#/media/File:Crotalus\\_cerastes\\_mesquite\\_springs\\_CA.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rattlesnake#/media/File:Crotalus_cerastes_mesquite_springs_CA.JPG)

[2] <https://www.cdc.gov/features/salmonellafrogturtle/index.html>

[3] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/12/20/rattlesnake-pills-worse-snake-oil-12313>

[4] <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/mexico-travel-advisory.html>

[5] <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6717a4.htm>