



Canine Bite Prevention

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Dogs provide many benefits to their families. Protecting the bond between people and their dogs is important.

Any dog of any breed has the potential to bite. Dog bites are a largely preventable public health problem. Most people are bitten by their own dog or one they know. There is little scientific evidence to support the claims that certain breeds of dogs are more likely to bite. A dog's individual history and behavior determine whether it will bite. Dogs may bite when they are defending themselves or their territory or a toy or food. They may bite when they are startled, or stressed or if your pet is not feeling well because they are sick or sore due to injury or illness. They may also bite during play so choose your games wisely. Avoid wrestling or playing tug of war.

Why be concerned about dog bites?

- About 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year.¹
- Almost one in five of those who are bitten, about 885,000, require medical attention for dog bite-related injuries; half of these are children.¹
- In 2012, more than 27,000 people underwent reconstructive surgery as a result of being bitten by dogs.²

Who is at risk?

- **Children:** Among children, the rate of dog bite-related injuries is highest for those ages 5 to 9 years, and children are more likely than adults to receive medical attention for dog bites.³ Most dog bites with children occur during everyday activities when interacting with familiar dogs.
- **Senior Citizens:** According to the American Veterinary Medicine Association, or AVMA, senior citizens are the second most common dog bite victims
- **Adult Males:** Male adults are more likely than female adults to be bitten.¹
- **People with dogs in their homes:** Among children and adults, having a dog in the household is associated with a higher incidence of dog bites. As the number of dogs in the home increases, so does the incidence of dog bites. Adults with two or more dogs in the household are five times more likely to be bitten than those living without dogs at home.¹

How can dog bites be prevented?

Before you bring a dog into your household:

- Carefully select your pet. Do not get a puppy on impulse.
- Wait until your child is older to get a dog. It is suggested



- that parents wait until the children are older than 4 years.
- Choose a veterinarian who can help you identify a reputable trainer for your new family member.
- Be sensitive to cues that a child is fearful or apprehensive about a dog. If a child seems frightened by dogs, wait before bringing a dog into your household. Dogs with histories of aggression are not suitable for households with children.
- Spend time with a dog before buying or adopting it. Use caution when bringing a dog into a household with an infant or toddler.

Once you decide to bring a dog into your home:

- Spay/neuter your dog (this often reduces aggressive tendencies).
- Never leave infants or young children alone with a dog. Teach children to be gentle and to respect the dog's space. Many owners provide a crate or sleep area for their pets and children should be taught to leave the dog alone in this space.

- Don't play aggressive games with your dog (e.g., wrestling).
- Properly socialize and train any dog entering your household. Socialize your puppy so it feels comfortable around other people and animals so it does not feel threatened or teased. Training your dog builds a bond of obedience and trust.
- Immediately seek professional advice (e.g., from veterinarians, animal behaviorists or responsible trainers) if the dog develops aggressive or undesirable behaviors. Some behaviors may be related to health problems caused by illness or injury and an examination by your veterinarian can help diagnose that issue.
- Keep your dog healthy. How a dog feels affects how it behaves. Follow the advice of your veterinarian regarding vaccinations and parasite control.
- License your dog and obey leash laws. Walk and exercise your dog regularly to keep it healthy and provide mental stimulation. Dogs are social animals and spending time with your pet is important.

Learn about Rabies see Extension Fact Sheet VTMD-9127

Teach children, including toddlers, these basic safety tips and review them regularly:

- Be cautious around strange dogs and treat your own pet with respect.
- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog. Children must be taught not to reach through or over fences to touch dogs.
- Teach your children to ask permission from the dog's owner before petting the dog.
- Do not run from a dog or scream.
- Remain motionless (e.g., "be still like a tree") when approached by an unfamiliar dog.
- If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and be still.
- Do not play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.
- Do not take bones, balls, sticks, toys or food away from a dog.

- Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
- If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.

Some experts recommend people climb on or into a nearby car or onto a fence or some type of structure to get out of reach of an attacking dog.⁵ They advise "giving" the attacking dog an object like a purse or coat that will distract the dog long enough for you to get away.⁵ These defensive techniques are appropriate for adults or children with the assistance of an adult, but there is concern a child may not have the presence of mind to safely climb out of reach without falling, which may stimulate or provoke an aggressive/upset dog to attack in an even more vicious manner. A child also may find it difficult to give an object to an attacking dog. A faltered attempt may result in a more severe injury.

Teach children to tell an adult immediately when they are bitten by any type of animal. If they are bitten by a strange dog, be sure to note the breed, size, color and which direction the dog went after the bite. Contact the local animal control department so they can apprehend the dog. Wash the bite with soap and water and seek medical attention as soon as possible. Always report the bite to the local health department.

The companionship and love of a pet can be a fun and enriching experience for a family. A dog is often a lifetime family member. Part of the joy of ownership involves teaching your pet good manners. Pet owners should properly care for, train and handle their dogs, being sure they educate their family concerning basic bite prevention.

References

1. Gilchrist J, Sacks JJ, White D, Kresnow MJ. Dog bites: still a problem. *Injury Prevention* 2008.
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3. CDC. Nonfatal Dog Bite--Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Departments--United States, 2001. *MMWR* 2003; 52(26): 605-610.
4. American Veterinary Medical Association, avma.org
5. Do's and Don'ts Concerning Vicious Dogs - D.A. Clifford, DVM, MPH, PhD, et al, produced by AVMA Professional Liability Insurance Trust.

The purpose of this educational fact sheet is to briefly highlight pet owner responsibilities, safety precautions around dogs, along with bite prevention tips. The defensive techniques described in this fact sheet are designed to prevent or minimize injury from dog bites. The fact that no one single defensive technique can guarantee to prevent all dog bites or injuries and because of the unpredictability of this subject matter, the author, OSU College of Veterinary Medicine, and the Cooperative Extension Service-Division of Agricultural Sciences, assumes no responsibility for injury that may result from using the defensive techniques in this fact sheet.

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