

Any Dog Can Bite

Even the cuddliest, fuzziest, sweetest pup can bite if provoked. Most people are bitten by their own dog or one they know. Some owners actually promote aggression in their dogs or allow aggression to go unchecked.

From nips to bites to actual attacks, dog bites are a serious problem. Dog bite victims requiring medical attention in the United States number approximately 800,000 annually. Countless more bites go untreated. On average, about a dozen people die each year from dog bites. Fortunately, there are steps we can take to address this problem.

Who's being bitten?



Statistically, the number of recorded dog bites are significantly higher in children than adults. The elderly and home service providers such as mail carriers and meter readers are also high on the list of frequent dog bite victims. **Caution: never leave a baby or child alone with a dog.**

What's a dog owner to do?

Carefully consider your pet selection. Puppies should not be obtained on impulse. Before and after selection, your veterinarian is the best source for information about behavior and suitability.

Make sure your pet is socialized as a young puppy so it feels at ease around people and other animals. Gradually expose your puppy to a variety of situations under controlled circumstances; continue that exposure on a regular basis as your dog gets older. Don't put your dog in a position where it feels threatened or teased.

Wait until your child is older. Because so many dog bites happen to young children, it is suggested that parents wait to get a dog until their children are older than 4 years of age.

Train your dog. The basic commands "sit," "stay," "no," and "come" can be incorporated into fun activities which build a bond of obedience and trust between pets and people. Avoid highly excitable games like wrestling or tug-of-war. Use a leash in public to control your dog.

Keep your dog healthy. Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and preventable infectious diseases. Parasite control and other health care is important because how your dog feels directly affects how it behaves.

Neuter your pet. It's a fact: neutered dogs are 3 times less likely to bite.

Be a responsible pet owner. License your dog with the community as required. Obey leash laws. Dogs are social animals; spending time with your pet is important. Dogs that are frequently left alone have a greater chance of developing behavior problems.

Be alert. Know your dog. Be alert to signs of illness. Also watch for signs your dog is uncomfortable or feeling aggressive.

How can my family and I avoid being bitten? Be cautious around strange dogs and treat your own pet with respect. Because children are the most frequent victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should:

- **NEVER** leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Be on the look out for potentially dangerous situations.
- Start teaching young children – including toddlers – to be careful around pets.

Children must be taught **NOT** to approach strange dogs. Teach children to ask permission from a dog's owner before petting the dog.

Other tips that may prevent or stop a dog attack

Don't run past a dog. Dogs naturally love to chase and catch things. Don't give them a reason to become excited or aggressive.

Never disturb a dog that's caring for puppies, sleeping or eating.

If a dog approaches to sniff you, stay still. In most cases, the dog will go away when it determines you're not a threat.



If you're threatened by a dog, remain calm. Don't scream. If you say anything, speak calmly and firmly. Avoid eye contact. Try to stay still until the dog leaves, or back away slowly until the dog is out of sight. Don't turn and run.

If you fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your head and neck. Protect your face.

What should I do if my dog bites someone?

Even if the bite can be explained (perhaps someone stepped on the dog's tail), it's important to take responsibility for your dog's actions by taking these steps:

• **Restrain the dog immediately.** Separate it from the scene of the attack. Confine it.

• **Check on the victim's condition.** Wash wounds with soap and water. Professional medical advice should be sought to evaluate the risk of rabies or other infections. Call 911 if paramedic response is required.

• **Provide important information** including your name, address and information about your dog's most recent rabies vaccination. If your dog does not have a current rabies vaccination, it may be necessary to quarantine it or even euthanize it for rabies testing. The person bitten may need to undergo rabies treatment.

• **Comply with local ordinances** regarding the reporting of dog bites.

• **Consult your veterinarian** for advice about dog behavior that will help prevent similar problems in the future.

If you are bitten

- If your own dog bit you, confine it immediately and call your veterinarian to check your dog's vaccination records.
- If someone else's dog bit you, first, seek medical treatment for the wound. Next, contact authorities and tell them everything you can about the dog: the owner's name, if you know it; the color and size of the dog; where you encountered the dog; and, if and where you've seen it before. These details may help animal-control officers locate the dog. In addition, consider asking your physician if post-exposure rabies treatment may be necessary.

Dogs are wonderful companions. By acting responsibly, owners not only reduce the number of dog bites, but also enhance the relationship they have with their dog.

To learn more about the joys and responsibilities of pet ownership, contact your veterinarian or local veterinary association.

And Now A Note On Your Pet's *General Good Health*

A healthy pet is a happy companion. Your pet's daily well-being requires regular care and close attention to any hint of ill health. The American Veterinary Medical Association suggests that you consult your veterinarian if your pet shows any of the following signs:

- Lumps or swelling
- Reduced or excessive appetite or water intake
- Marked weight loss or gain
- Limping, stiffness or difficulty getting up or down
- Difficult, discolored, excessive or uncontrolled waste elimination (urine and feces)
- Abnormal discharges from any body opening
- Head shaking, scratching, licking or coat irregularities
- Changes in behavior or fatigue
- Foul breath or excessive tartar deposits on teeth

More information may be found online at:

www.avma.org/press/publichealth/dogbite/mediakit.asp
www.cdc.gov/injury



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What you should know about **Dog Bite Prevention**



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