



Dog Bites – Prevention and Treatment

Even the cuddliest, fuzziest, sweetest pup can bite if provoked. Unwisely, some owners actually promote aggression in their dogs as symbols of power. From nips to bites to actual attacks, dog bites are a serious problem. Dog bite victims requiring medical attention in the United States number 500,000 to 1 million annually. Countless more bites go unreported and 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? Children make up more than 60 percent of all dog bite victims. The national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates half of all children 12 and younger have been bitten by a dog. The elderly and home service people - like mail carriers and meter readers - also are high on the list of frequent dog bite victims.

What's a dog owner to do?

Consider your pet selection: what kind of dog do you want? Learn as much as possible about different breeds and their behaviors.

Make sure your pet is socialized: Expose your puppy to different situations a little at a time and under supervision; continue that exposure on a regular basis as your dog get older. If you are not sure of how your dog will react to a situation such as a large crowd or noisy area, please be cautious. Don't put your dog in a position where he/she feels threatened or teased.

Train you dog: The basic commands of "sit", "stay," "no" and "come" can all be incorporated into fun activities which build a bond of obedience and trust between people and your pet.

Keep your dog healthy: Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and preventable infectious diseases. Parasite control is important to how your dog feels and behaves.

Neuter your pet: FACT: Neutered dogs are less likely to bit. Both neutered male canine and felines tend to stop roaming and fighting.

Be alert: Know you dog. You naturally would be alert to signs of illness, but you must 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 lookout for potentially dangerous situations.
- Start teaching young children - including toddlers - to be careful around pets.

Children must be taught NOT to approach strange dogs. Children should be taught 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: your name and 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.

Report the bite to your insurance company.

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 the bite victim - treat wounds.

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, contact authorities and tell them everything you can about the dog: the owner's name, if you know it; color of the dog; size; where you saw it; if you've seen it before. These details may help animal-control officers locate the dog.

Information provided by the State Farm Insurance Company and the American Veterinary Medical Association