

## 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.

Although media reports and rumors often give the impression that certain breeds of dog are more likely to bite, there is little scientific evidence to support those claims.

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 bite injuries go untreated. On average, about a dozen people die each year from dog bite injuries. Fortunately, there are steps we can take to address this problem.

## Who's being bitten?

The number of recorded dog bite injuries is 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 select your pet. Don't get a puppy on impulse. Before and after selection, your veterinarian is your best source for information about behavior, health 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 bite injuries happen to young children, it is suggested that parents wait to get a dog until 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 that 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 ensure you are able to control your dog.

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

**Neuter your pet.** The available science suggests neutered dogs may be less likely to bite.

**Be a responsible pet owner.** License your dog with your community as required. Obey leash laws. If you have a fenced yard, make sure the gates are secure. Dogs are social animals; spending time with your pet is important. Dogs that are frequently left alone have a greater chance of developing behavioral problems. Walk and exercise your dog regularly to keep it healthy and provide mental stimulation.

**Be alert. Know your dog.** Be alert to signs of illness. Also watch for signs your dog is uncomfortable or behaving aggressively.

## 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 common victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should:

- **NEVER** leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Be alert for potentially dangerous situations.
- Teach children – including toddlers – to be careful around pets.



Children must be taught NOT to approach strange dogs or try to pet dogs by reaching through fences. Teach your children to ask permission from the 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.

*Never reach through or over a fence to pet a dog.*

Dogs can be protective of their territory, and may interpret your action as a threat.

*If a dog approaches to sniff you, stay still.*

In most cases, the dog will go away when it determines you are not a threat.

*If you are threatened by a dog, remain calm.*

Don't scream or yell. 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 (e.g., someone stepped on your 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. Unseen damage can occur with bites, and can lead to complications. Professional medical advice should be sought to evaluate bite wounds and the risk of rabies or other infections. Call 911 if a response by paramedics 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 post-exposure prophylaxis.
- **Comply with local ordinances** regarding 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. Consult with your veterinarian about your dog's aggressive action. Your veterinarian can examine your dog to make sure it is healthy, and can help you with information or training that may prevent more bites.
- If someone else's dog bit you, first seek medical treatment for your 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, where, and when 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 prophylaxis is necessary.

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

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### For more information, visit:

American Veterinary Medical Association	<a href="http://www.avma.org">www.avma.org</a>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov/injury">www.cdc.gov/injury</a>
American Academy of Pediatrics	<a href="http://www.aap.org">www.aap.org</a>
United States Postal Services	<a href="http://www.usps.com">www.usps.com</a>

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# Dog Bite Prevention



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