

- **Don't reach into a dog's personal space.** Stand with your side to the dog and let the dog approach you. If the dog does not approach you, do not pet the dog. If the dog approaches and invites interaction, pet the dog calmly and gently on its body.
- **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:

- **Restrain the dog immediately.** Separate the dog from the scene of the attack and confine him/her.
- **Check on the victim's condition.** Wash wounds with soap and water. 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. Local ordinances determine what will happen to your dog if his/her rabies vaccine is out of date.
- **Comply with local ordinances** regarding reporting dog bites.
- **Consult your veterinarian** for advice about dog behavior that will help prevent similar problems in the future.

Most people are bitten by their own dog or one they know.

IF YOU ARE BITTEN

- **If your own dog bit you,** confine it to a safe area immediately and check its vaccination status. Seek medical attention for the bite. Consult with your veterinarian about your dog's action. Your veterinarian can examine your dog to make sure it is healthy and can help you with information or training that may prevent future bites.
- **If someone else's dog bit you,** seek medical treatment for your wound. If possible, obtain the owner's contact information and the dog's vaccine history. Report the bite to the proper 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 and its owner. Based on the dog's rabies vaccination status, consider asking your physician if post-exposure rabies prophylaxis is necessary.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

American Veterinary Medical Association
avma.org

DOG BITE PREVENTION

*Brought to you by your veterinarian
and the American Veterinary Medical Association*



avma.org

(C) 2020 American Veterinary Medical Association



ANY DOG CAN BITE

Even the cuddliest, fuzziest, sweetest pup can bite if provoked. 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.

Most people are bitten by their own dog or one they know. Some owners actually make the mistake of promoting aggression in their dogs or allowing aggression to go unchecked.

From nips to bites to actual attacks, dog bites are a serious problem. Several hundred thousand dog bite victims require medical attention in the United States each year – at least half of them children. Countless more bite injuries go untreated. 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. Bites to the face and neck are more common in young children. The elderly and home service providers such as mail carriers and meter readers are also high on the list of frequent dog bite victims.

WHAT'S A DOG OWNER TO DO?

Focus on taking actions that we know increase the chance of a bite occurring:

Carefully select the right pet for your family. Don't get a puppy on impulse. Talk with your veterinarian about your unique situation and what type of dog might be best for you. Before and after selection, your veterinarian is your best source for information about behavior, health and suitability.

Socialize your pet to feel at ease around people and other animals. Gradually expose a puppy to a variety of situations under positive, controlled circumstances. Continue that exposure on a regular basis as your dog gets older. Don't put your dog in a position where he/she feels threatened, anxious, overly excited, or teased.

Take extra care with young children. If you have a dog and young children, always supervise their interaction with dogs, including your own dogs. Young children aren't equipped to interpret dogs' body language, so responsible adults need to advocate for the safety and welfare of both the dog and the child. Carefully manage the introduction of a child or a new dog to your household. Coach children to act calmly, avoiding sudden movements and yelling, which can startle the pet.

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. Talk with your veterinarian about how to do this. The training method used can influence your dog's behavior, and positive reinforcement training is recommended by veterinary behaviorists to produce the best results. Avoid highly excitable games like wrestling or tug-of-war. Use a leash in public to ensure you can control your dog.

Keep your dog healthy. Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and preventable infectious diseases. Parasite control and overall health care also are important because how your dog feels directly affects how it behaves. Dogs in pain are more likely to bite. Have painful conditions such as arthritis or injuries addressed by your veterinarian.

Be a responsible pet owner. Obey leash laws. If you have a fenced yard, make sure the gates are secure. Walk and exercise your dog regularly to keep it healthy and provide mental stimulation. Studies of dog bite events suggest that it may be beneficial to neuter your dog; discuss this procedure with your veterinarian.

Learn your dog's body language. Typically, dogs will show a variety of signs that they are nervous before their fear prompts aggressive behavior. Recognize when your dog is stressed, uncomfortable, or showing signs of aggression, and be prepared to prevent escalation of the situation. Remove your dog from situations that could increase the risk of biting. Provide your dog with a safe place (such as a quiet room where it can't be disturbed) to escape stressful situations. If your dog shows signs of fear or aggression that seem unprovoked or potentially dangerous, consult your veterinarian to determine the cause and seek treatment.



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 use extra caution:

- Never leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Be alert for potentially dangerous situations, and take measures to prevent or stop them from escalating. This includes teaching children to avoid approaching or disturbing dogs who are sleeping, eating, or nursing puppies.
- Teach children – including toddlers – to be careful around and respectful of pets.

Teach children not to approach strange dogs or try to pet dogs by reaching through fences. Teach your children to appreciate unfamiliar dogs from afar, and to respect that not all dogs want to be petted by strangers or by children. If a leashed dog appears to seek your child's attention, ask permission from the owner before allowing your child to pet the dog. If your child does pet a dog, make sure the child keeps their face away from the dog's mouth and pets the dog as instructed by the owner. Do not let your child hug an unfamiliar dog; for that matter, even the family dog might not appreciate being hugged.

OTHER TIPS TO HELP PREVENT OR STOP A DOG BITE

- **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.
- **Always provide a dog the option to leave.** Never force a dog to interact with you, a child, or another animal. Having the choice to walk away helps prevent a dog from feeling trapped and scared.
- **Do not lean over a dog.** This may be interpreted by the dog as threatening, which can make it anxious and more likely to bite.