



This handout contains an overview of prevention measures to use to reduce the occurrence of dog bites and the zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted from bites.

Overview

Each year over 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs. Children are the most common victim; the highest injury rates occurring in those 5 to 9 years old. Bites can cause tissue damage but can also become infected with bacteria from the animal's mouth. Bites are not limited to dogs and cats; several accounts of unprovoked attacks by ferrets have required medical care in young children. Your veterinarian can be a source of advice on bite prevention and behavior modification issues for pets.

Bite Prevention Actions

Dog bites occur most commonly and most seriously in children. The following actions should be used and taught to children to help avoid being bitten.

- Never approach a strange dog
- If a strange dog approaches you
 - Stand tall with your hands crossed across your chest—"stand like a tree"
 - Do not move or run away
 - Do not yell or scream
 - Do not look the dog directly in the eye
- If a strange dog knocks you down
 - Roll into a ball or flat on the ground, cover your ears with your hands and lie still ("lie like a log") until the dog leaves
- Try to keep an object (jacket, backpack, bicycle) between you and the dog, if the dog tries to bite you
- Tell an adult right away if a dog tries to bite you
- If you see a stray dog or a dog that is acting strangely, tell an adult right away; the adult should contact the local animal control office
- Stay away from dogs that are
 - Sleeping, eating, taking care of puppies, or guarding their toys
 - Behind fenced yards or chained in the yard
 - In parked cars
- Do not approach a dog unless an adult is present
 - Infants or children should never be left unattended with a dog of ANY BREED (or any pet)
- Before petting any dog, let it see you and sniff you first

Pet Behavior

- Before selecting a pet, consult a veterinarian or animal behaviorist to learn what animal species (and/or breed) is suitable for your household and lifestyle.
- Spend time with a pet before buying or adopting it
 - Any pet with a history of aggression is unsuitable for a household with children
 - Use caution when bringing pets into homes with an infant or toddler
- To reduce the risk of aggression
 - Spay or neuter dogs and cats
 - Socialize and train your dog
 - Take your dog to obedience or behavioral training
 - Avoid aggressive games and rough play with pets
 - Teach your dog submissive behaviors, such as rolling over to expose its abdomen
- Seek professional advice immediately if a dog develops aggressive or undesirable behaviors.

Bite Wound Care and Management

Improperly treated bites (and scratches) can result in infection. To reduce the risk of infection or transmission of zoonotic diseases, proper bite wound care involves:

- Prompt and thorough wound cleansing with soap and/or disinfectant
- Consultation with a physician if the injury is a deep puncture wound, if extensive or deep tissue damage occurred or if the wound is severely bleeding. Any wound that does not heal properly or shows signs of infection should also be seen by a physician

For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Dog Bite Prevention at www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/biteprevention.htm

National Association for Humane and Environmental Education. Dog Bite Prevention Resources and Tips for Children at www.nahee.org/bite.asp

The Humane Society of the United States. Avoiding Dog Bites at www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/dog_care/stay_dog_bite_free/avoiding_dog_bites.html

The Humane Society of the United States. Teaching Your Child to Avoid Dog Bites at www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/dog_care/stay_dog_bite_free/teaching_your_child_to_avoid_dog_bites.html