

Most Dog Bites Preventable!

The majority of animal bites in the U.S. are from household pets, with most being inflicted by dogs. Most animal bites reported to the county health officer involve dogs. There are more than 60 million pet dogs in the U.S.; half of all bites are inflicted by the family dog.

Dog bites are a serious public health problem that inflicts considerable physical and emotional damage on victims. The insurance industry estimates it pays more than \$1 billion a year in homeowners' liability claims resulting from dog bites. Hospital expenses for dog bite-related emergency visits are estimated at \$100 million.

Dog bites can result in criminal and civil liability for pet owners. Homeowners may be shocked to receive a letter from their homeowner's insurance company informing them their coverage was dropped because of their dog. Insurance companies say dog bite injuries account for more than one-third of all liability claims against homeowners insurance.

Health professionals play key role in prevention

Dogs have shared their lives with humans for more than 12,000 years; that coexistence has contributed substantially to humans' quality of life. Dog bites are a largely preventable public health problem, and adults and children can learn to reduce their chances of being bitten.

Dog Bites

- Dogs are members of the family in industrialized countries. In Europe, it is estimated that one family in three owns a dog as a family pet.
- Children are at least 3 to 5 times more likely to experience dog bites than adults, and are the most common victims of serious dog bites. Seventy percent of fatal dog attacks and more than half of bite wounds requiring medical attention involve children.
- People over 70 years of age comprise 10% of those bitten and 20% of those killed.
- Every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. seeks medical attention for a dog bite-related injury.
- In the U.S., more than half of dog bites occur at home and about one-third in a public place. Most biting dogs have owners and are not strays. The victim is often the owner or a friend of the owner.

Customarily, when confronted with patients seeking care for dog bites, physicians and nurses have confined their roles to providing medical treatment. However, in addition to treating dog bites and their complications, healthcare providers have critical roles to play in reducing dog bite injuries. Taking advantage of teachable moments should be considered part of curative care.

The American College of Emergency Physicians advises to never leave young children unattended with animals. Visit their website at: <http://www.acep.org/webportal/PatientsConsumers/HealthSubjectsByTopic/AnimalBites/default.htm>.

Education is vital

Education is the key to reducing dog bites. When a patient is being treated for a bite, the opportunity exists to prevent future

injury by teaching bite-avoidance strategies and promote safety around dogs.

Teach Children Basic Safety Around Dogs

- Remain motionless (e.g., "be still like a tree") when approached by an unfamiliar dog. Do not run from a dog and scream.
- If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still (e.g., "be still like a log").
- Do not play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.

Source: <http://lapublichealth.org/vet/dogattk.htm>

Intact males tend to be the aggressors

Sex differences do emerge from data on various types of aggression. Intact male dogs represented 80% of dogs presented to veterinary behaviorists for dominance aggression, which is the most commonly diagnosed type of aggression. Intact males are also involved in 70 to 76% of reported dog bite incidents. Neutered dogs are three times less likely to bite.

California law requires that all dogs over the age of four months be licensed as a rabies control measure. In the county, neutered or castrated dogs cost less to license.

Reporting animal bites

Animal bites are required to be reported to the health officer as part of mandated rabies control. This can be done online (<https://abweb.lapublichealth.org/phcommon/public/bite/biteaddform.cfm?ou=ph&unit=veter&prog=dcp>), fax (562) 401-7112, or by telephone (877) 747-2243.

Bites from wild animals are less common; however they are more dangerous because of the threat of rabies. For example, in 2001, 7,437 cases of rabies in animals (mostly wildlife) and no human cases were reported to CDC. The last diagnosed case of human rabies in Los Angeles County was in 2005. About one rabid animal a month is diagnosed in the county.

National Dog Bite Prevention Week in May

Every spring, the U.S. Postal Service, CDC, and other agencies call attention to what continues to be one of the nation's most commonly reported public health problems: dog bites. The annual number of dog attacks exceeds the reported instances of measles, whooping cough, and mumps, combined. In addition, dog bite victims account for up to 5% of emergency room visits.

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