

DOG BITE PREVENTION GUIDE



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BRIEF INTRODUCTION

May is International Dog Bite Prevention Month. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 4.5 million Americans are bitten by dogs each year and those at greatest risk are children.¹

Dog bites can be tragic. Almost one in five of those who are bitten, about 885,000, require medical attention for dog bite-related injuries and half of these are children.² Additionally, in 2012, more than 27,000 people underwent reconstructive surgery as a result of being bitten by dogs.³

But dog bites can be prevented! This guide is designed to help prevent dog bites by providing the following information:

- 1. Dog Bites: An Overview page 3
- 2. Dog Owners: Prevent Dog Bites with Good Care page 4
- 3. Parents: Tips for Dog Bite Prevention, Treatment and Legal Help page 5
- 4. Dog Bites: Treatment page 8
- 5. Dog Bites: The Law page 9

Please review this guide, share the appropriate information with your children, and also share it with your child's school. If we are all properly educated about dog bites, we can prevent more people from getting hurt.

1. DOG BITES: OVERVIEW

The statistics on dog bites are alarming. According to the American Humane Association:

- An estimated 4.7 million dog bites occur in the U.S. each year ^{5,6}
- Nearly 800,000 dog bites require medical care ⁵
- Approximately 92% of fatal dog attacks involved male dogs, 94% of which were not neutered ⁴
- Approximately 25% of fatal dog attacks involved chained dogs ⁴
- Approximately 71% of bites occur to the extremities (arms, legs, hands, feet) ⁵
- Approximately two-thirds of bites occurred on or near the victim's property, and most victims knew the dog
- The insurance industry pays more than \$1 billion in dog-bite claims each year ⁶
- At least 25 different breeds of dogs have been involved in the 238 dog-bite-related fatalities in the U.S. ⁷
- Approximately 24% of human deaths involved unrestrained dogs off of their owners' property ⁷
- Approximately 58% of human deaths involved unrestrained dogs on their owners' property ⁷

Of note: **Victims of dog bites are mostly young boys, ages 5 to 9. These boys are bitten on the head and neck by unneutered male dogs and about 25 percent of the dogs who bite these boys were chained.** In the following pages, parents and dog owners alike will learn ways to educate children and to care for dogs in ways that can help to prevent bites.

Further, at the end of this guide, you will find legal resources should you or your child be bitten by a dog. Some of the injuries from dog bites can be catastrophic, and yet less than 1 percent of dog bite victims receive compensation even though they may be permanently scarred and must pay for medical treatment. Both dog owners and parents should read this information in order to take appropriate legal steps following a dog bite incident.

Additional Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationsafety/dog-bites/index.html>
- Doggone Safe: <http://www.doggonesafe.com/>

2. DOG OWNERS: PREVENT DOG BITES WITH GOOD CARE

There is no way to guarantee that your dog won't bite someone, but there are many good ways to reduce the risk. Better yet: by following these steps, your dog will be a pet that you trust, respect and love more!

Spay or neuter your dog.

This important and routine procedure will reduce your dog's desire to roam and fight with other dogs. Further, neutering reduces aggression, especially in males. Studies show that unneutered dogs are more than 2.6 times more likely to bite than neutered dogs.⁶ Additionally, female dogs in heat and nursing dogs are much more dangerous than spayed females, and their behavior can be unpredictable.

Supervise your dog.

Dogs left on their own may feel uncertain and defensive, or even overly confident, and this poses risks to your dog, as well as to other people and dogs.

Train and socialize your dog.

Be sure your dog interacts with and has good manners around all members of the family, the public and other animals. Basic training is as important for the owner as it is for the dog, and socialization is the key to a well-adjusted adult dog. It is essential that puppies between 8 and 16 weeks old be exposed to a variety of people, places, dogs and other animals. As dogs age, do your best to continue their exposure to these things to ensure that they are well socialized throughout their lives.

Teach your dog how to behave

Teach your dog appropriate behavior. Don't teach your dog to chase after or attack others, even in fun. Your dog can't always understand the difference between play and real-life situations. Set appropriate limits for your dog's behavior. Don't wait for an accident. The first time he exhibits dangerous behavior toward any person, seek professional help from your veterinarian, an animal behaviorist, or a qualified dog trainer.

Restrain your dog, but don't chain your dog.

Twenty-four percent of fatal dog attacks involved loose dogs that were off their owner's property. Dogs that are allowed to roam loose outside the yard may perceive your entire neighborhood as their "territory" and may defend it aggressively. By obeying leash laws and taking care to properly fence your yard, you will not only be respecting the laws in your community but you will also be helping to keep your dog safe from cars, other dogs and unforeseen dangers.

Do not use a chain in your yard as a dog restraint. Chained dogs are 2.8 times more likely to bite. Tethering or chaining dogs increases their stress, protectiveness and vulnerability, thereby increasing the potential for aggression. Fencing is a better solution.

Additional resources:

- The Humane Society of the United States: http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/dogs/tips/prevent_dog_bites.html
- The American Humane Association: <http://www.americanhumane.org/animals/stop-animal-abuse/fact-sheets/dog-bites.html>
- Dogwise.com: <https://www.dogwise.com/ItemDetails.cfm?ID=DTB836>

3. PARENTS: TIPS FOR DOG BITE PREVENTION, TREATMENT AND LEGAL HELP

Here are some alarming statistics for parents:

- 50% of dog attacks involved children under 12 years old
- 82% of dog bites treated in the emergency room involved children under 15 years old⁵
- 70% of dog-bite fatalities occurred among children under 10 years old⁷
- Bite rates are dramatically higher among children who are 5 to 9 years old⁵
- Unsupervised newborns were 370 times more likely than an adult to be killed by a dog⁷
- 65% of bites among children occur to the head and neck⁵
- Boys under the age of 15 years old are bitten more often than girls of the same age⁵

As a parent (and possibly a dog owner), you have a lot at stake in your efforts to prevent dog bites.

Dog Bite Prevention

Supervise your children.

Unsupervised children may innocently wander too close to a dangerous situation. Eighty-eight percent of fatal dog attacks among 2-year-olds occurred when the child was left unsupervised.⁴ Supervision of children, especially around dogs, is one way to help ensure they are safe.

Educate your children.

Studies have found that the number-one dog-bite prevention measure is education. Children who understand how to act around dogs, how to play with dogs, when to leave dogs alone and how to properly meet a dog are much less likely to be bitten.

Teach your children the following:

- Don't treat a dog unkindly.
- Never hit, kick, slap or bite a dog or pull on his ears, tail or paws.
- Don't bother a dog when she is busy.
- Never bother dogs with puppies or dogs that are playing with or guarding toys, eating or sleeping.
- Always leave service dogs alone while they are working.
- Don't approach a dog you don't know.
- Never approach a dog that is tied up, behind a fence or in a car.
- If you find a loose animal, call the police or animal control for help.

Teach your children the steps to take around a loose dog. You can practice the following exercises and make them fun for your child.

- **Stand like a tree.**

Dogs are stimulated by movement and noise and children are known for making movement and noise. One of the most valuable skills that children can learn is to stand still and "Be a Tree" if a strange dog comes near them, or if a dog is bothering them or becoming too frisky.⁸

Here is how to "Be a Tree":

1. Stop.
2. Fold in your branches (hands folded in front).
3. Watch your roots grow (look at your feet).
4. Count your breaths in your head until help comes or the dog goes away.⁸



"Trees" are boring to dogs. A dog will just sniff at a child/tree and then go away. No matter what the dog does, it is important for the child to stand still, avoid eye contact (by looking down at his/her feet), and stay quiet.

- **Curl into a ball.**

If you are on the ground when a loose dog approaches, curl up into a ball like a rock. Keep your knees to your chest and your hands over your ears. Stay quiet and calm. Look down at your knees, not at the dog.

- **Move slowly.**

Always make slow movements, set things down carefully and don't run when you're around dogs, as this gets them excited and they may accidentally hurt you.

Teach your children to recognize the signs of stress in a dog.

Dogs communicate their feelings, just like we do! But, of course, they can't use words. So, we need to learn how to read their signs and teach our children to understand dog communication. There is a fun video at the Humane Society of the United States website. Watch it with your children, read the words aloud, and see if they can guess the dogs' moods.

- http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/dogs/tips/avoid_dog_bites.html
- Doggone Safe is a non-profit organization dedicated to dog bite prevention through education and dog bite victim support. They also have an online quiz to help you test your understanding of dog body language: http://www.doggonesafe.com/dog_bite_prevention

A good guide for children is that if the dog is all soft and wiggly, then he is not likely to bite. If a dog is stiff like a statue then he is dangerous.



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Recognize the signs of imminent bite

Make sure that your child learns to recognize dog body language and, in particular, the signs of imminent bite⁹:

- dog freezes - becomes suddenly stiff
- dog stands with front legs splayed, head low, looking at you
- dog curls lip to show teeth

If you see a dog displaying the above signs of imminent bite, cease all interaction with the dog, look away and give the dog the opportunity to leave. Do not approach the dog, do not make eye contact, and do not talk to the dog. If you are touching the dog, stop and move your hands slowly away. If you are taking something from the dog, let go of it. It is better for him to keep it than for you or a child to get bitten. If you are bending over the dog, slowly straighten up and look away.

Additional Resources:

- Doggone Safe: <http://www.doggonesafe.com/>
- Creatures and Kids: <http://creaturesandkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Bite-Prevention-written-information-rv-0501121.pdf>

4. DOG BITES: TREATMENT

According to MedicineNet.com, if you or your child is bitten by a dog make sure to do the following¹⁰:

- The dog bite victim needs to be taken to a safe place away from the assailant dog to prevent further attack and injury.
- Since dog bites can cause significant damage beneath the skin, a type of injury that cannot easily be appreciated, medical care should be accessed by a health care practitioner.
- Wounds should be kept elevated and, if possible, wash the wound with tap water.
- Information should be obtained from the dog's owner and the dog's veterinarian about the dog's rabies immunization status. If this is not possible, hospital, animal control centers, or law enforcement personnel will help gather any required information.

5. DOG BITES: THE LAW

Immediately Following a Dog Bite: Legal Steps

According to DogsBite.org, even when a dog bite injury appears superficial – and particularly when the dog isn't your own pet – you should take the following steps immediately following a dog bite.¹¹ If you ultimately require help under the law, taking these steps will go a long way toward protecting your rights.

Identify the dog

The most important first step you can take after a dog bite is to identify the dog. Find out who owns the dog or where the animal lives. If the dog is a stray and you cannot identify it, you may be forced to undergo a series of rabies shots, which are expensive and painful.

Seek medical care

Depending upon the severity of the bite, contact first responders (911) for medical attention or have someone drive you to emergency care. Always seek medical care after a dog bite. The risk of infection from a dog bite is far too great to ignore.

File a bite report

After you've been medically treated -- even if the injury was minor -- file a bite report with your city or county animal control or sheriff's department. This legally documents your case and provides help to the next victim who may be harmed by the same dog. Without a paper trail, authorities cannot enforce effectively.

Gather information

To protect your future rights as a victim, obtain the name and address of the dog owner, in addition to the dog license information. Find out if the dog has a record, as well. Has the dog bitten a person or dog prior to biting you? Has the dog been labeled "potentially dangerous" or "dangerous?"

Photograph injuries

Take photos of your injury. It is recommended that you photograph all of your wounds, including bruises, as well as torn, bloody clothing and the location of the attack.

Contact an attorney

Contact a dog bite attorney now -- not later. The issues surrounding dog bites are complex and difficult to navigate. Your dog bite lawyer (or personal injury lawyer) is the only person who will look after your best interest from this point forward.

Begin a journal

Lastly, if you seek medical reimbursement for your injury, start a journal as soon as you can. Spend a little time each day recording your thoughts for the few first weeks after the attack. Dog bite claims can often take several years to complete. Anticipate keeping this journal on a biweekly basis over the course of this time.

Your legal rights after a dog bite

Dog owners and dog bite victims should know their rights – and responsibilities – under the law.

Dog bite laws vary by state.

Your rights as a dog bite victim vary by where you live. Generally speaking, most states impose liability on a dog owner for all dog bites. The victim is compensated through the dog owner's homeowners or renters insurance. However, some states follow the "one bite rule." Under this rule, a dog's owner is liable for injuries the dog causes only if the owner knew or had reason to know that the dog was likely to cause that kind of injury. So, if you are a dog owner and your dog tries to bite someone, from that moment on you're on notice that the dog is dangerous, and you will be liable if the dog bites again later.¹¹

Proving liability.

If you are the victim of a dog bite and you seek compensation for your injuries and damages, you will need to prove one of three things:

- The dog previously bit another person or acted like it wanted to, and that the dog owner knew about it.
- A third party (such as a landlord) was negligent and the negligence caused the incident to occur.
- A third party violated an animal control law (such as a leash law) and the violation caused the incident to happen.

Determining insurance coverage.

Of course, once you prove liability, there is still the question of whether the liable person is covered by insurance. Determining whether the liable person has insurance is important on two levels.

If the liable person *does* have insurance, it means...

- There will be money available to pay the victim.

- The victim can retain an attorney on a contingency fee basis (meaning the attorney does not receive a fee unless he or she recovers a settlement on the victim's behalf). If there is no insurance, the victim rarely can retain a lawyer because there is a very slim chance that he/she could collect enough money to compensate both the victim and the attorney.

How much are you due?

Another factor to consider when deciding whether to seek compensation for your injuries is to determine if the amount of compensation at stake is great enough to warrant your effort to obtain it. Simply put, will your case earn enough to cover the costs of your injuries and the cost of an attorney, and is it worth the time, emotions and effort that you will commit during the case.

The amount of compensation that you can expect depends on the nature and extent your injuries, the extent and impact of the medical treatment, and many other factors. These are likely costs that a victim cannot assess due to emotional reasons as well as inexperience. Dog bite victims are not experts on dog bites! Therefore, the only people who can estimate the amount of compensation at stake are attorneys who represent victims.

Should you hire an attorney?

If you truly believe you require and deserve compensation, then you should quickly consult with an attorney who is an expert in this field of the law. You may think you could save money by pursuing compensation on your own, but only an expert in these types of cases understands all the ways that you can access insurance monies. Further, most attorneys in this specialty (personal injury) do not ask for any fees or compensation until the case is complete.

The law is very complex; if you are injured by a dog bite, you need help in attaining the reparations that you are due.

DOG BITES: CONCLUSION

Dog bites are far too common, especially given the fact that many of them are entirely preventable. As parents, as dog owners, as citizens of our communities, we have a responsibility to understand the causes of dog bites and to work together to prevent them.

FOOTNOTES

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