

Preventing Dog Bites

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that over 4.7 million are bitten by dogs each year. Their instincts tell them to chase prey, guard their territory, protect their young, and defend themselves when cornered. Dogs communicate with the only tools they have - their bodies, a range of verbal sounds, and their teeth. Most dog bites are reported as "unprovoked." However, something causes a dog to bite, and individuals are often taken by surprise. There are ways to protect your self. Here's are some basic tips on how to prevent dog bites:

Learn the warning signs:

The warning signs may include:

- Growling, snarling or aggressive barking.
- Shyness or fear, such as when a dog crouches, has his head low or tail between his legs. Fearful dogs can be just as dangerous as aggressive ones.
- When fur is raised up, ears erect, body stiff, and tail high, the dog is trying to communicate, "Stay away from me, or I'll do something drastic!"
- An unnaturally still or unresponsive dog. Many fighting breeds have been bred for their ability to disguise aggressive intentions.
- A dog in pain will bite anyone who touches him - even his owner

Avoid dangerous situations:

Follow these tips to avoid coming face-to-face with a biting dog:

- Stay away from dogs that are in cars, chained or cornered. They often feel vulnerable and will fight to protect their territory.
- Never run past a dog. Joggers and children on bicycles can trigger their instinct to chase and attack.
- Don't get near a dog that's eating, chewing, sleeping or caring for puppies.
- Never tease a dog or play too rough.
- Be careful around older dogs. They may be blind, sensitive to touch or hearing-impaired.
- Never leave infants or children alone with a dog. According to the CDC, infants top the list for dog-related deaths.

- Never try to break up a dogfight with your hands. Use a water hose, stick or throw a blanket over the dogs to disorient them. Children should call an adult for help.
Keep your face away from your dogs, especially when disciplining.

Know self-defense moves:

Many people are bitten because they unintentionally provoke or escalate an attack. If an aggressive dog approaches you don't make eye contact or move suddenly. This can challenge a dog and cause the dog to attack. Stand motionless, like a statue. Face the dog but turn your head away. If lunged at, don't try to overpower the dog. If you're holding something, put it into the dog's mouth. If you don't have anything in your hand, put your arm up to protect your face. If you're knocked down to the ground, don't move or scream. Pretend that you are a turtle: curl up in a ball, face down, and cover your head with your arms. Stay in this position until the dog leaves.

Make your dog people-safe:

- Take your dog to obedient training or classes. This will help develop the dog's respect for humans.
- Your dog should be part of the family. Unsocialized "outdoor" dogs bite more frequently than "indoor" dogs.
- Establish house rules and standards of behavior for your dog. This will make your pet happier, more respectful and safer to be around.

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