



Responsible Dog Ownership, Preventing And Avoiding Dog Bites

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Ga., estimates that nearly 2 percent of the U.S. population is bitten by a dog each year. This translates into 4.7 million people per year, a majority of whom are children.

As many as 800,000 people, more than half of them children, require medical attention. About a dozen people die each year from dog bite injuries.

Whether your dog is a family pet or a working dog on your farm or ranch, you may become liable for someone's injuries if your dog bites or attacks him or her. Being a responsible dog owner and learning how you can prevent dog bites can help you avoid such situations. Remember that both male and female dogs can be dangerous.

Beyond the expense of defending against a lawsuit and paying for damages resulting from your dog injuring someone, other factors may come into play if your dog is aggressive. Rates for your property insurance may increase, or you may be unable to secure coverage. You may be inconvenienced if an aggressive dog on your property prevents the delivery of mail or other parcels. Relationships with neighbors may become strained, and communities may develop breed-specific ordinances or bans after dog bites occur.

What causes a dog to bite?

Dogs may bite out of fear, to protect their territory, to establish dominance, or for several other reasons. Some owners mistakenly teach their dogs that biting is an acceptable form of play. Dogs may bite infants or small children if they see them as prey. Family dogs have also

unintentionally harmed or killed an infant when they are left unsupervised and the dog attempts to interact with the infant. Because dog bites occur for a variety of reasons, many components of responsible dog ownership – including proper socialization, supervision, humane training, sterilization and safe confinement – are necessary to prevent them from biting.

Are some breeds of dog more likely to bite than others?

All breeds may bite; studies indicate many breeds and crossbreeds have been involved in dog-bite incidents.

Preventing dog bites

There is no way to guarantee that your dog will never bite someone. But you can reduce the risk of it happening. Here's how:

- » **Spay or neuter your dog.** This will reduce his or her desire to roam and fight with other dogs, making safe confinement an easier task. Spayed or neutered dogs are three times less likely to bite.
- » **Socialize your dog.** Introduce your dog to many people and situations so it isn't nervous or frightened under normal social circumstances.

- » **Train your dog.** Go to a training class with your dog – it’s an excellent way to socialize it and for you to learn proper training techniques, even if you are an experienced dog owner. Every member of your household should learn the training techniques and participate in your dog’s education. Never send your dog away to be trained; only you can teach your dog how to behave in your home.
- » **Teach your dog appropriate behavior.** Set appropriate limits for your dog’s behavior. The first time he or she exhibits dangerous behavior toward anyone, particularly children, seek professional help from your veterinarian, an animal behaviorist or a qualified dog trainer. Your community animal care and control agency or Humane Society may also offer helpful services. Dangerous behavior toward other animals may eventually lead to dangerous behavior toward people and is also a reason to seek professional help.
- » **Be a responsible dog owner.** License your dog as required by law, and provide regular veterinary care, including rabies vaccinations. For everyone’s safety, don’t allow your dog to roam. Make your dog a member of your family. Dogs who spend a great deal of time alone in the backyard or tied on a chain often become dangerous. Dogs who are well-socialized and supervised are much less likely to bite.
- » **Err on the safe side.** If you don’t know how your dog will react to a new situation, be cautious. If your dog could panic in a crowd, leave it at home. If it overreacts to visitors or delivery and service personnel, keep it in another room. Work with professionals to help your dog become accustomed to these and other situations. Until you are confident of its behavior, however, avoid putting your dog in stressful settings.

How to avoid being bitten

Never approach a strange dog, especially one that’s tied or confined behind a fence or in a car. Don’t pet a dog – even your own – without letting it see and sniff you first. Never turn your back to a dog and run away. A dog’s natural instinct will be to chase and catch you. Don’t disturb a dog while he or she is sleeping, eating, chewing on a toy or caring for puppies. Be cautious around strange dogs. Always assume a dog that doesn’t know you may see you as an intruder or a threat.

Here are some steps to follow if you’re approached by a dog that may attack you:

- » Never scream and run.
- » Remain motionless, hands at your sides, and avoid eye contact with the dog.
- » Once the dog loses interest in you, slowly back away until it’s out of sight.
- » If the dog does attack, “feed” it your jacket, purse, bicycle or anything that you can put between yourself and the dog.
- » If you fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your ears and remain motionless.
- » Try not to scream or roll around.

Teach children how to avoid being bitten

Children can be taught to practice safety around dogs. The most important lessons they should learn are not to chase or tease dogs and to avoid dogs they don’t know.

Sources:

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Humane Society of the United States*

For more information about American Family’s Loss Control Services, visit www.amfam.com

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The recommendations printed here follow generally accepted safety standards. Compliance with these recommendations does not guarantee that you will be in conformance with any building code, or federal, state or local regulations regarding safety or fire. Compliance does not ensure the absolute safety of you, your operations or place of business.