

Any Dog Can Bite

Even the cuddliest, fuzziest, sweetest pup can bite if provoked. Most people are bitten by their own dog or one they know. Some owners actually promote aggression in their dogs or allow aggression to go unchecked.

From nips to bites to actual attacks, dog bites are a serious problem. Dog bite victims requiring medical attention in the United States number approximately 800,000 annually. Countless more bites go untreated. On average, about a dozen people die each year from dog bites. Fortunately, there are steps we can take to address this problem.

Who's being bitten?



Statistically, the number of recorded dog bites are significantly higher in children than adults. The elderly and home service providers such as mail carriers and meter readers are also high on the list of frequent dog bite victims. **Caution: never leave a baby or child alone with a dog.**

What's a dog owner to do?

Carefully consider your pet selection. Puppies should not be obtained on impulse. Before and after selection, your veterinarian is the best source for information about behavior and suitability.

Make sure your pet is socialized as a young puppy so it feels at ease around people and other animals. Gradually expose your puppy to a variety of situations under controlled circumstances; continue that exposure on a regular basis as your dog gets older. Don't put your dog in a position where it feels threatened or teased.

Wait until your child is older. Because so many dog bites happen to young children, it is suggested that parents wait to get a dog until their children are older than 4 years of age.

Train your dog. The basic commands "sit," "stay," "no," and "come" can be incorporated into fun activities which build a bond of obedience and trust between pets and people. Avoid highly excitable games like wrestling or tug-of-war. Use a leash in public to control your dog.

Keep your dog healthy. Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and preventable infectious diseases. Parasite control and other health care is important because how your dog feels directly affects how it behaves.

Neuter your pet. It's a fact: neutered dogs are 3 times less likely to bite.

Be a responsible pet owner. License your dog with the community as required. Obey leash laws. Dogs are social animals; spending time with your pet is important. Dogs that are frequently left alone have a greater chance of developing behavior problems.

Be alert. Know your dog. Be alert to signs of illness. Also watch for signs your dog is uncomfortable or feeling aggressive.

How can my family and I avoid being bitten? Be cautious around strange dogs and treat your own pet with respect. Because children are the most frequent victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should:

- NEVER leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Be on the look out for potentially dangerous situations.
- Start teaching young children – including toddlers – to be careful around pets.

Children must be taught NOT to approach strange dogs. Teach children to ask permission from a dog's owner before petting the dog.

Other tips that may prevent or stop a dog attack

Don't run past a dog. Dogs naturally love to chase and catch things. Don't give them a reason to become excited or aggressive.

Never disturb a dog that's caring for puppies, sleeping or eating.

If a dog approaches to sniff you, stay still.

In most cases, the dog will go away when it determines you're not a threat.



If you're threatened by a dog, remain calm. Don't scream. If you say anything, speak calmly and firmly. Avoid eye contact. Try to stay still until the dog leaves, or back away slowly until the dog is out of sight. Don't turn and run.

If you fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your head and neck. Protect your face.

What should I do if my dog bites someone?

Even if the bite can be explained (perhaps someone stepped on the dog's tail), it's important to take responsibility for your dog's actions by taking these steps:

- **Restrain the dog immediately.** Separate it from the scene of the attack. Confine it.
- **Check on the victim's condition.** Wash wounds with soap and water. Professional medical advice should be sought to evaluate the risk of rabies or other infections. Call 911 if paramedic response is required.
- **Provide important information** including your name, address and information about your dog's most recent rabies vaccination. If your dog does not have a current rabies vaccination, it may be necessary to quarantine it or even euthanize it for rabies testing. The person bitten may need to undergo rabies treatment.
- **Comply with local ordinances** regarding the reporting of dog bites.
- **Consult your veterinarian** for advice about dog behavior that will help prevent similar problems in the future.

If you are bitten

• If your own dog bit you, confine it immediately and call your veterinarian to check your dog's vaccination records.

• If someone else's dog bit you, first, seek medical treatment for the wound. Next, contact authorities and tell them everything you can about the dog: the owner's name, if you know it; the color and size of the dog; where you encountered the dog; and, if and where you've seen it before. These details may help animal-control officers locate the dog. In addition, consider asking your physician if post-exposure rabies treatment may be necessary.

Dogs are wonderful companions. By acting responsibly, owners not only reduce the number of dog bites, but also enhance the relationship they have with their dog.

To learn more about the joys and responsibilities of pet ownership, contact your veterinarian or local veterinary association.

And Now A Note On Your Pet's *General Good Health*

A healthy pet is a happy companion. Your pet's daily well-being requires regular care and close attention to any hint of ill health. The American Veterinary Medical Association suggests that you consult your veterinarian if your pet shows any of the following signs:

- Lumps or swelling
- Reduced or excessive appetite or water intake
- Marked weight loss or gain
- Limping, stiffness or difficulty getting up or down
- Difficult, discolored, excessive or uncontrolled waste elimination (urine and feces)
- Abnormal discharges from any body opening
- Head shaking, scratching, licking or coat irregularities
- Changes in behavior or fatigue
- Foul breath or excessive tartar deposits on teeth

More information may be found online at:

www.avma.org/press/publichealth/dogbite/mediakit.asp
www.cdc.gov/injury



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What you should know about **Dog Bite Prevention**



CARING FOR ANIMALS
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Every home contains a variety of everyday items and substances that can be dangerous or even fatal if ingested by dogs and cats. You can protect your pet's health by becoming aware of the most common health hazards found in many pet-owning households.

HAZARDS IN THE KITCHEN

Foods

Many foods that are perfectly safe for humans could be harmful or potentially deadly to dogs and cats. To be safe, keep the following food items out of your pet's menu:

coffee grounds	fatty foods	tea
chocolate	avocado	alcohol
yeast dough	grapes/raisins	salt
macadamia nuts	onions	garlic
chewing gum, candy and breath fresheners containing xylitol		

Always keep garbage out of a pet's reach, as rotting food contains molds or bacteria that could produce food poisoning.



Cleaning Products

Many household cleaners can be used safely around cats and dogs. However, the key to safe use lies in reading and following product directions for proper use and storage.

For instance, if the label states "keep pets and children away from area until dry," follow those directions to prevent possible health risks. Products containing bleach can safely disinfect many household surfaces when used properly, but can cause stomach upset, drooling, vomiting or diarrhea, severe burns if swallowed, and respiratory tract irritation if inhaled in a high enough concentration. In addition, skin contact with concentrated solutions may produce serious chemical burns. Some detergents can produce a similar reaction and cats can be particularly sensitive to certain ingredients such as phenols.

As a general rule, store all cleaning products in a secure cabinet out of the reach of pets and keep them in their original packaging, or in a clearly labeled and tightly sealed container.

Insecticides/Rodenticides

As with household cleaners, read and follow label instructions before using any type of pesticide in your pet's environment. For example, flea and tick products labeled "for use on dogs only" should not be applied to cats or other species, as serious or even life-threatening problems could result. Always

consult with your veterinarian about the safe use of these products for your pet.

If a pet ingests rat or mouse poison, potentially serious or even life-threatening illness can result; therefore, when using any rodenticide, it is important to place the poison in areas completely inaccessible to pets.

HAZARDS IN THE BATHROOM

Medications

Medications that treat human medical conditions can make pets very sick. Never give your pet any medication unless directed by your veterinarian. As a rule, the following medicines should be tightly closed and stored in a secure cabinet above the counter and away from pets:



Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen
acetaminophen
cold medicines
prescription drugs
diet pills/vitamins
antihistamines
antidepressants

Soaps and other Sundries

Bath and hand soaps, toothpaste and sun blocks should also be kept away from your pets. They can cause stomach upset, vomiting or diarrhea. Keep toilet lids closed to prevent your pets from consuming treated toilet bowl water that could irritate their digestive tract.

HAZARDS IN THE BEDROOM AND LIVING ROOM

While they may smell good, many liquid potpourri products contain ingredients that can cause oral ulcerations and other problems, so keep them out of the reach of your pets.

Just one mothball has the potential to sicken a dog or cat and mothballs that contain naphthalene can cause serious illness, including digestive tract irritation, liver, kidney and blood cell damage, swelling of the brain tissues, seizures, coma, respiratory tract damage (if inhaled) and even death (if ingested). Tobacco products, pennies (those minted after 1982 contain zinc) and alkaline batteries (like those in your remote controls) can also be hazardous when ingested.



HAZARDS IN THE GARAGE AND YARD

Antifreeze, Herbicides and Insecticides

Ethylene glycol-containing antifreeze and coolants, even in small quantities, can be fatal to both dogs and cats. While antifreeze products containing propylene glycol are less toxic than those containing ethylene glycol, they can still be dangerous. In addition to antifreeze, other substances routinely stored in the garage including insecticides, plant/lawn fertilizers, weed killers, ice-melting products and gasoline also pose a threat to your pet's health if ingested.

When chemical treatments are applied to grassy areas, be sure and keep your pet off the lawn for the manufacturer's recommended time. If pets are exposed to wet chemicals or granules that adhere to their paws, they may lick it off later; stomach upset or more serious problems could result.

Paints and Solvents

Paint thinners, mineral spirits, and other solvents are dangerous and can cause severe irritation or chemical burns if swallowed or if they come in contact with your pet's skin.

While most latex house paints typically produce a minor stomach upset, some types of artist's or other specialty paints may contain heavy metals or volatile substances that could become harmful if inhaled or ingested.

Plants - Inside or Around the House

There are many household and yard plants that can sicken your pet. Some of the most commonly grown greenery that should be kept away from pets include:

- *Lily of the Valley, oleander, azalea, yew, foxglove, rhododendron and kalanchoe may cause heart problems if ingested.*
- *Rhubarb leaves and shamrock contain substances that can produce kidney failure. Certain types of lilies (Lilium and Hemerocallis species) are highly toxic to cats, resulting in kidney failure — even if only small amounts are ingested.*
- *Sago palms (Cycad species) can cause liver damage, especially if the nut portion of the plant is consumed.*
- *Additionally, fungi such as certain varieties of mushrooms can cause liver damage or other illnesses.*

A few other potentially harmful plants include philodendron, corn plant, castor bean, mother-in-law's tongue, Hibiscus and hydrangea.

For a complete listing of common toxic and non-toxic plants, visit www.apcc.apca.org.

OTHER HOUSEHOLD HAZARDS

Small items that fall on the floor can be easily swallowed by a curious cat or dog. Such items include coins, buttons, and small children's toys, medicine bottles, jewelry, nails, and screws. The result may be damage to your pet's digestive tract and the need for surgical removal of the object.



While electrical cords are especially tempting to puppies who like to chew on almost anything, even an adult dog or cat could find them of interest; burns or electrocution could result from chewing on live cords. Prevent this by using cord covers and blocking access to wires.

HOLIDAY HAZARDS

Don't forget that holidays and visitors can pose a special challenge to your pets. Discourage well-meaning guests from spoiling pets with extra treats and scraps from the dinner table. Fatty, rich or spicy foods can cause vomiting and diarrhea and lead to inflammation of the pancreas. Poultry or other soft bones can splinter and damage your pet's mouth or esophagus.



While trick or treating is fun for children, it can be hazardous to pets. Halloween treats such as chocolate or candy sweetened with xylitol can make a harmful snack. Certain Halloween and Christmas decorations (especially tinsel, ribbons and ornaments) also pose a hazard to pets, so make sure nothing is left on the floor or on tables within reach.

String-like items can damage your pet's intestine and could prove fatal if not surgically removed. While poinsettia is not deadly as popular legend would have it, it could still cause an upset stomach if consumed. Holly and mistletoe are especially dangerous plants. Christmas tree water treated with preservatives (including fertilizers) can also cause an upset stomach. Water that is allowed to stagnate in tree stands contains bacteria that, if ingested, could lead to nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

A SPECIAL NOTE OF CAUTION TO BIRD-OWNERS

Just like dogs and cats, most hazards listed here apply to your pet bird, particularly if it is allowed to roam freely outside of its cage. In addition, birds have unique respiratory tracts that are especially vulnerable to inhaled particles and fumes from aerosol products, tobacco products, certain glues, paints, and air fresheners. Birds should never be allowed in areas where such products are being used. As a rule, birds should never be kept in kitchens because cooking fumes, smoke and odors can present a hazard.



WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PET IS POISONED

Don't wait! Time is critical for successfully treating accidental poisoning. Pick up the phone and call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (1-888-426-4435; a consultation fee may apply). Be prepared to state your pet's breed, age, weight and any symptoms. Keep the product container or plant sample with you to assist in identification so the appropriate treatment recommendations can be made.

For more information about pet poisons, visit the ASPCA Poison Control Center

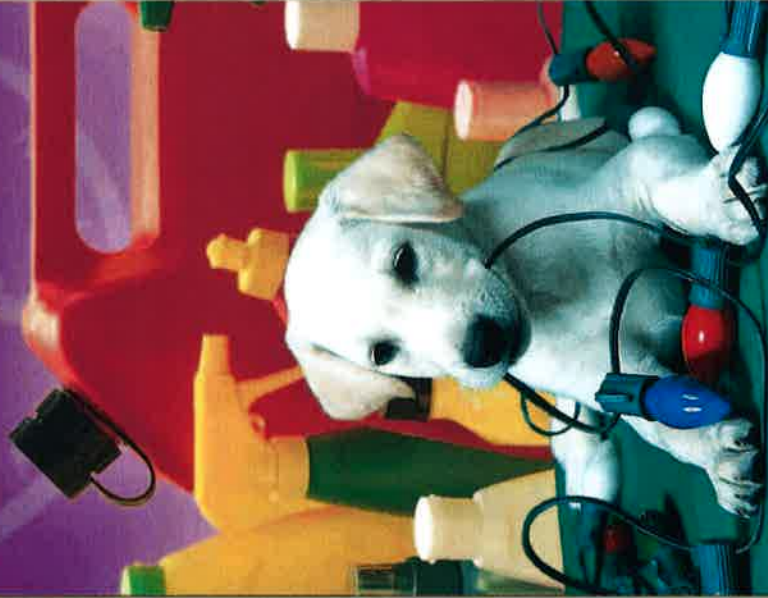
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Cover photo of lab and lights by Paulette Braun



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