

DOG BITES



The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) estimates that between 2 and 3 million dog bites are reported to local authorities each year. Millions more go unreported.

Dog bites range from painless nips to fatal maulings. Children are most often the victims. Dog attacks are the most commonly reported childhood public-health problem in the United States; in number they exceed the reported instances of measles, whooping cough, and mumps combined. Victims of dog bites account for up to 5 percent of all hospital emergency-room admissions.

You may feel confident that your dog won't add to these statistics, and it is probably true that your trusty companion will never seriously harm anyone. Many dog attacks, however, come from dogs whose owners assumed that their dogs were safe.

If your dog attacks or bites someone, you may well be liable for the victim's pain, suffering and medical costs. There are several ways you can reduce that liability. Reducing the likelihood that your dog will ever bite someone helps protect you, your canine companion, and everyone else in your community.

Why Do Some Dogs Bite?

Although dogs may bite for a variety of reasons, whether or not a dog has been spayed/neutered greatly affects the degree of the dog's aggressiveness. Bite statistics show that unsterilized dogs are up to three times more likely to bite than sterilized dogs. Lack of socialization, improper training, excitement and fear can all contribute to a dog attack. But even a nip on the calf is unacceptable behavior for a family dog.



Is There Any Way I Can “Bite-Proof” My Dog?

There is not way to guarantee that your dog will never bite someone. But you can significantly reduce the risk:

- Spay or neuter your pet. Sterilization will not only reduce aggression but will also decrease a dog's tendency to roam. However, spaying/neutering won't reduce a dog's protectiveness.
- Train and socialize your pet. Set appropriate limits on acceptable behavior. Help your dog become a trustworthy member of your family and community.
- Teach your dog appropriate behavior. Don't play aggressive games with your dog such as wrestling, tug of war, or siccing your dog on another person. It's essential that your dog recognize you and all the members of your family -including your children- as dominant and not challenge your leadership.
- Keep your dog restrained and don't let him/her to chase a postal vehicle and risk injury to him/herself or others.
- Be a responsible pet owner. License and vaccinate your dog. For everyone's safety, don't allow him/her to roam. Make your pet a member of your family. Dogs who spend too much time in the doghouse or tied in the backyard have a much greater chance of developing behavioral problems such as aggression. Dogs who are well socialized 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 may panic in crowds, leave him/her at home. If your dog may overreact to visitors or delivery persons, keep him/her in another room. Help your dog become accustomed to a variety of situations. Until you're confident of his/her behavior, however, avoid unusual situations.
- When a letter carrier or delivery person visits, keep your dog restrained or in another room. Don't allow your dog to jump up against your door or bite the mail as it comes through the mail slot. Don't let your child take mail from the letter carrier in the presence of your dog. Your dog's instinct is to protect the family.
- Look for warning signs. Pet owners can often recognize their dog's displays of aggression before an attack occurs. A dog may show aggression by disobeying or showing signs of dominance-especially over small children-such growling, or nipping. Of course, if your dog ever attacks another animal without provocation, seek professional advice immediately. Proper training can usually eradicate aggressive behavior.