

Dog Bites: Easy Ways to Protect, Educate Children

The statistics are scary: Every 40 seconds someone seeks medical attention for a dog bite, and the majority of victims are children under the age of 15.

According to data tracked by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 25 different dog breeds were involved in biting incidents in 2006, a statistic that shows that any dog can bite if provoked.

To keep pets and people safe, veterinary professionals have joined forces. The third full week in May is National Dog Bite Prevention Week, and doctors promote year-round education of pet owners and parents. Teaching children how to approach dogs slowly and carefully as well as how to recognize warning signs are critical components of dog bite prevention. Remember, not all dogs are friendly and not all dogs want to be touched.

“Any dog may bite, even your family pet,” said Marie Wheatley, president of American Humane, an organization that works to protect children and animals. “Adults should always supervise children when they play with any dog, and they should teach children the best ways to approach and treat animals to avoid being bitten.”

Some children, eager to play or touch an animal's soft fur, move quickly or lunge at dogs. Such abrupt actions can be misinterpreted by dogs as an attack, and dogs may try to protect themselves by snarling or biting.

Here are a few suggestions to help keep kids and pets safe:

- Never approach unknown dogs or dogs whose owners are not present
- Always ask an owner's permission before petting a dog
- Stand still, like a tree, if an unfamiliar dog approaches you
- Never run from or scream around a dog
- If you believe a dog is about to attack you, place something (backpack, bicycle) between yourself and the dog
- If a dog knocks you over, roll into a ball, cover your face, and stay still
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies

-Provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

Dog Bite Statistics:

- Children under 15 years of age represent 70 percent of dog bite victims
- At least 25 different breeds of dogs were involved in 238 dog-bite-related deaths. Out of all the human deaths that resulted from dog attacks, 24 percent involved unrestrained dogs off their property and 58 percent involved unrestrained dogs on their property.

-Provided by the CDC and AVMA