

Dog bite prevention



Nearly 90 million nice dogs... but any dog can bite

Dog bites pose a serious health risk to our communities and society. More than 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs each year in the United States, and more than 800,000 receive medical attention for dog bites, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). At least half of those bitten are children. Here are more dog bite facts:

- Almost 1 in 5 people bitten by dogs require medical attention.
- Children are the most common victims of dog bites and are far more likely to be severely injured.
- Most dog bites affecting young children occur during everyday activities and while interacting with familiar dogs.

Any dog can bite: big or small, male or female, young or old. Even the cuddliest, fuzziest, sweetest pet can bite if provoked. Remember, [it is not a dog's breed](#) that determines whether it will bite, but rather the dog's individual history and behavior.

Most dog bites are preventable, and there are many things you can do at home and within your community to help prevent them.

Why do dogs bite?

Dogs bite for a variety of reasons, but most commonly as a reaction to something. If the dog finds itself in a stressful situation, it may bite to defend itself or its territory. Dogs can bite



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because they are scared or have been startled. They can bite because they feel threatened. They can bite to protect something that is valuable to them, like their puppies, their food or a toy.

Dogs might bite because they aren't feeling well. They could be sick or sore due to injury or illness and might want to be left alone. Dogs also might nip and bite during play. Even though nipping during play might be fun for the dog, it can be dangerous for people. It's a good idea to avoid wrestling or playing tug-of-war with your dog. These types of activities can make your dog overly excited, which may lead to a nip or a bite.

National Dog Bite Prevention Week®: April 9–15, 2023

[National Dog Bite Prevention Week®](#) takes place during the second full week of April each year, and focuses on educating people about preventing dog bites. Read up on dog bite prevention tips, and use the **#PreventDogBites** hashtag to share dog bite prevention information from April 9–15!

National Dog Bite Prevention Week® is a project of the [National Dog Bite Prevention Week® Coalition](#).



Preventing dog bites



You can take steps to prevent dog bites. Plan for success by educating yourself and your children, providing adequate supervision, providing opportunities for your puppy to become socialized, and removing your dog from escalating situations.

PROTECTING CHILDREN

- **Educate yourself and any children in your life about how to have a good interaction with a dog.** Teach them to respect animals, and to understand that the dog needs time alone sometimes. They should know that it's not okay to run up to a dog, even if that dog is on a leash and with its owner; let them know to approach dogs calmly. They should also understand what to do if confronted by an aggressive dog, how to tell when a dog wants to play and when it doesn't want to play, and to ask a dog's owner for permission to pet it. The owner should always be there, and in outdoor settings the dog should be on a leash -- this is the only time it's safe to pet an unknown or semi-familiar dog. Children should also be taught never to approach a strange dog.
- **Break your house into zones if you have young children.** You should be able to keep the dog in one area and the child in another when you are out of sight or busy, and get your child used to that arrangement from a young

age. Allow your children to interact with your dog regularly, but only with supervision and attention to keeping the interactions positive. Baby gates provide simple means of zoning your home. By using a baby gate to separate the dog from a child, the dog can still see and hear what's happening; isolating your dog completely from daily activities can cause risky behaviors and should be avoided. There's a difference between zoning and imprisonment: with proper zoning, the dog is calm, cooperative, and indirectly involved in certain activities.

- By teaching your dog to respect the gate and the zones, (s)he will understand that (s)he won't be trapped behind the gate for a long time and will be able to interact directly with your family when it's appropriate. You should start to use zoning when your dog is a puppy as method of managing his/her behavior, not just physically controlling it.
- **Keep young children and the dog separated unless there is constant adult supervision.** If you leave the room even for a short time, the dog and child should be separated. Leaving a baby or toddler alone in the room with a dog just for a minute can lead to tragic results. Also be alert for any signs of aggression from the dog toward the child, or of any situations that could have the potential to escalate (such as a child taking a dog's toy or food, for example). If your dog seems to be exhibiting fear or aggression that is inappropriate or difficult to understand, seek help from a veterinary behaviorist to resolve the problem. It may be that the dog perceives the situation very differently from you, and a few simple changes will put him or her at ease again.

SETTING YOUR DOG UP FOR SUCCESS

- **Socialize your dog as a puppy.** By introducing your puppy to people and other animals, you help it become more comfortable in different situations as it gets older.
- **Be with your dog when he or she interacts with unfamiliar people,** and don't force people to interact with your dog if they appear reluctant, uninterested or afraid. An interaction can easily and quickly change from play to aggression, especially with kids. However, children should interact with animals -- and they should be taught the difference between having a good interaction and a bad one.
- **Remove your dog from the situation whenever they seem to be anxious or agitated,** or is behaving in an inappropriate manner. Put your dog somewhere safe and quiet. By doing this, you're not actually punishing the dog. You're interrupting behaviors you don't like, and that gives you time to change the situation before bad behaviors become habits.
- **Provide your dog with a secure resting space and supervision in risky situations.** Your dog is part of your family and wants to be part of family life. But sometimes it's difficult for us to fully understand how a dog sees the world.