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August 31, 2018

DOG BITES – Tips on What To Do

The relationship between humans and dogs goes back thousands of years. They are valuable companions to us for many reasons. At the same time, however, things can go wrong and dogs may bite.

Here are some dog bite prevention tips:

- Be aware that small children may be particularly at risk because they are closer to the dogs height making the animal more “confident” in its reaction to them. They are also more likely to do things that the dog may not like. Never allow a child to interact with a dog unsupervised – especially if it is a strange dog whose behavior is unknown.
- Be aware that any dog can bite if provoked. Of course, those larger in size can do more damage.
- Do not enter a strange dog’s “territory” in the absence of the owner or another person who knows and can control the dog.
- When leaving a premises in the presence of dogs, do not turn your back on them. Many will attack and bark when you are LEAVING, because in their minds, they are chasing you from their territory and when you leave, they “win”. This is positive reinforcement for them. (This is why dogs chase cars – every time they do so the car goes away and they “win”!) Keep an eye on the dog as you depart, as eye contact can be a deterrent. If in doubt, have the owner escort you out.
- Do not disturb strange dogs when they are eating, sleeping, playing with toys, if they appear sick or injured, or are female and have young puppies with them or nearby. Never step over a sleeping dog. Dogs may react badly if their immediate “space” is invaded, their “possessions” are threatened or if they feel they may be hurt.
- Be aware of a dog’s body language. If you MUST approach a strange dog, stoop down to become less threatening, call the animal and carefully reach

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out (not within touch range!) from below the dog's level with palm up, calling to the animal in a gentle voice. A calm, friendly dog will lick its lips, keep its ears in a relaxed position, wag its tail and reach forward to be touched. If the dog returns a blank stare, with mouth closed, ears pulled back, tail lapped under the body, DO NOT attempt to touch the animal. Pull back and move away.

- Avoid approaching a group of dogs out on the street, especially at nights. All it takes is one of them to bark and become a “set on” for the rest.
- DO NOT TEASE dogs across a fence or gate. This aggravates them and increases the chances of an attack if the gate is open, or the fence breaks down. Many dogs act aggressively when behind a fence or gate, but without the protective barrier they are quiet, but do not take chances.
- Most owners know their dogs and their behavior. If a dog has aggressive tendencies, please have it secured when visitors are around, preferably in a kennel or other enclosure since chains can be broken, collars may slip off, or the animal may injure itself if it pulls on a chain.
- Non-breeding male dogs should be neutered (castrated). This makes them more manageable in that it removes the influence of the male hormone testosterone which fuels dominance aggression. Neutered males are still territorial and will remain good watch dogs.
- Puppies need to be “socialized” as they grow – learning to interact with people, other animals and the environments they are exposed to. The critical period is between about 6 weeks and 4 months of age, but it can be started even earlier. A well-socialized puppy is less likely to bite inappropriately when it grows up.
- Dogs should be obedience trained – basic “come, sit, stay” training is very important. They should not be teased, hurt, or otherwise “agitated” in order to make them aggressive. This can lead to attacking and biting in the wrong circumstances. Proper “protection” training procedures can be done by competent trainers *after* successful obedience training.
- Dogs being walked on the street should be SECURELY leashed, with a collar that cannot slip over the head. Very large and powerful dogs should be taught to wear a muzzle, which should fit comfortably, allowing the dog to pant freely, and not slip off easily. A special “pinch collar”, NOT a choke chain, can be used for additional restraint if it is necessary. This gives a

“pinch” if the dog tugs on the leash, rather than choking the animal as a choke chain does.

If you are attacked:

- If you can retreat to safety BEFORE the dog gets near you, do so. Back away, keeping your eyes on the animal – do not turn your back.
- If there is no escape, then you must try not to show fear. Do not turn your back or run as this increases the chance you will be bitten. Face the animal down – stand your ground and shout loudly and aggressively with an angry expression. In many cases, the dog will stop and keep a certain distance. THIS DOES NOT GUARANTEE YOU WON'T GET BITTEN, but may at least improve your chances of escaping injury.
- If that fails and you are taken down, curl up into a ball, face down, protecting your face and neck, pulling your arms and legs in tightly to your body.

If you are bitten:

- Wounds can be washed with clean water and antiseptic. Apply pressure to any wound that is bleeding.
- Seek medical attention – dog bite wounds can become seriously infected in some cases, will likely be painful for some time, and also may require tetanus (lockjaw) prevention. In Jamaica, we are considered free of the rabies, so there is no risk of contracting that disease.
- If bites are severe, or if bleeding is heavy, the victim should seek *emergency* medical attention.