



## [Dog Bites Often Increase in Warmer Weather](#)

*by [John Demas](#) on 03/23/10 at 11:57 am Posted in: [Child Safety](#)*

As warmer temperatures return and people head outdoors more often, they're at greater risk of sustaining serious dog bites. Everyone needs to bear this fact in mind since about four-to-five million Americans are bitten by dogs each year.

Approximately one-fifth of those injuries require some form of medical treatment.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 31,000 people had to have reconstructive surgery in 2006 due to their dog bites. Sadly, children are at greater risk of being bitten than anyone else, largely due to their trusting nature and desire to make every dog their friend. It's critical for all parents and caregivers to teach children to never pet animals they've never seen before.

The CDC reports that children between the ages of five and nine are especially vulnerable to dog bites. As most of us know, small children often fail to recognize danger before it's too late. Even careful adults can be bitten if they drop their guard too soon upon encountering startled, frightened or aggressive dogs.

### **Ways to Protect Yourself from Harmful Dog Bites**

The following tips can help each of us lower our chances of being bitten by a dog.

- Thoroughly look into a dog's behavioral history and learn more about its breed before deciding if it might get along well with you and your family;
- If you can, be sure to interact for an extended period of time with any dog you're hoping to adopt. Some of the best shelters will allow you to do this since they want to avoid having any pets returned to them. Ask if there's a special pen or area set aside for this purpose. Find out if the adoption facility

will allow your child to also interact with the dog. Be prepared to sign some type of liability waiver before you and other members of your family will be given this option.

- Consider adopting a dog currently living in a foster home so you can visit with the caregiver about the dog's behaviors and tendencies;
- Once you bring a new dog home, never leave it alone with any of your children, especially the younger ones. Don't even leave your older kids alone with a new dog until you're certain they all get along well and your kids know to never antagonize any pet;
- Always supervise your children when they're playing outside. Even if you don't have a dog, you can never know when one might jump into your yard or follow someone into it after a gate has been opened. Always keep a first aid kit available and be ready to take your child for immediate medical help after a dog bite;
- Remind every family member to never wave their hands or other objects too close to a dog's face or head; this can startle the dog and make her react much more aggressively than normal;
- Be sure to have your dog spayed or neutered since this often helps reduce aggressive behavior;
- Don't allow anyone to play rough or wrestle with your dog;
- Train your dog to respond obediently to your commands. Give serious thought to enrolling your dog in a local pet store's obedience class so proper behaviors can be taught. This small (or moderate) financial investment can greatly increase your family's future happiness – and your dog's;
- Never approach a dog you don't know and try to pet it. If the owner is present, ask if the dog is usually friendly to strangers. Next, let the dog approach you first and sniff you briefly before trying to pet it;
- Hire a dog trainer if your dog demonstrates serious behavioral problems. This odd behavior often shows up when a new child enters the home or another pet;

- Avoid running or screaming when an unfamiliar dog approaches (try to remain motionless);
- If a strange dog knocks you to the ground, roll into a ball and lie still — try to protect your face with your hands;
- Report stray dogs to the proper authorities; keep this phone number posted near your main phone or list it on your cell phone;
- Never look directly into an unfamiliar dog's eyes as this can aggravate the dog and make it to behave even more aggressively;
- Don't ever disturb any dog that's sleeping, caring for its young or eating;
- Make sure to take your dog in for regular medical check-ups and shots. An aggressive dog may simply be ill or in great pain;
- Be sure your pet gets plenty of exercise, even if you have to hire someone else to help you walk your dog daily. Excess energy can sometimes increase a dog's aggressive behavior. Buy ample toys for young puppies and older dogs.
- When you must leave town, be sure to board your dog in facilities known for always properly feeding, walking and caring for pets. Get referrals from your vet or friends for such places. Paying a little extra for your pet's boarding can keep your pet calm and make it easier for him to readjust to your home environment once you and your family return;
- Make sure that each family member gets a tetanus shot every five years (or at regular intervals suggested by your doctor); and
- Consider having a local veterinarian or dog trainer speak to your child's school and your local parents' group to be sure everyone receives a refresher course on avoiding dog bites (or how best to handle them once they occur).

Our firm hopes that this list of tips will keep you and your family safe from the more dangerous dogs that sometimes appear in all neighborhoods. However, be sure to teach your children that a good family dog can become one of the best friends they'll ever have.

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