

## Avoiding Dog Bites

Our topics for this week are:

- **Risks of being bitten by a dog in the U.S.**
- **How to avoid bites from strange dogs**

Dogs that you know are unlikely to bite you if they are socialized properly when they are less than 16 weeks old, they not treated roughly, and is not a breed selectively bred for aggressiveness. Other actions to take in preventing your dog from being a biter include: selecting a dog appropriate for a family's living situation and family members, training the dog to obey simple commands, keeping the dog on a leash in public, and avoiding aggressive games like wrestling or tug-of-war with the dog. If the dog is male, it should be neutered early in life. A safe and secure containment (well-maintained fence, kennel, crates) should be maintained and tethering should be strictly avoided. Each dog should be given individual play time and receive short periods of training each day.

However, when confronted by an unrestrained, strange dog, you cannot control any of the prior mentioned conditioning.

### **Risks of Being Bitten by a Dog in the U.S.**

Each year dogs kill about 20-30 people in the U.S., seriously injure at least 800,000 with bite wounds serious enough to require hospital attention, and are estimated to inflict a total 4.5 million bites. Horses kill more people, but dogs cause more hospitalizations. The most dangerous dogs are larger dogs, not because they necessarily bite more often, but because their bites inflict more damage. Most dogs involved in a killing are in the 50 to 100 lb. weight range. The ability to inflict a killing bite is instinctive. Non-fatal wounds are usually to the arms, hands, or face. In addition to the puncture wounds, a large dog can generate enough pressure to cause significant crushing injuries. Tearing injuries may also occur when after making the bite and holding on, the dog often shakes its head and sometimes its whole body or the victim tries to withdraw quickly. Dogs involved in serious bites to humans are primarily male. Male dogs are 6.2 times more likely to bite people, and intact males are 2.6 times more likely to bite than neutered male dogs. However, once a dog develops the courage and ability to successfully bite a human, neutering has little effect in preventing future attempts to bite.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported the dog breeds most often involved in fatal human attacks, which are in descending order of risk: pit bulls, Rottweilers, German shepherd dogs, Huskies, Alaskan Malamutes, Doberman pinschers, chow-chows, Great Danes, and Akitas. An association of liability lawyers lists pit bulls, Rottweilers,

chows, and Akitas as the most dangerous dogs. In 2009, the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps prohibited pit bulls, Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers, chow-chows, and wolf-hybrids in U.S. military housing units due to the risk of severe bites.

### **AVOIDANCE OF DOG BITES**

Most bites from strange dogs can be avoided by not provoking an attack by teasing or taunting, invading a dog's territory, wrestling games with the dog, causing loud, sudden noises (firecrackers, gun fire), bothering a dog that is eating, the presence of a female dog in heat, trying to separate dogs that are fighting, or demonstrating fear.

### **ADULT HANDLER RESPONSE TO DOG ATTACK**

Defense in dog attacks can either be reactive or proactive, but preparation for both is advisable. Basic defense includes not screaming, avoiding eye contact, remaining motionless, and backing away slowly when the dog moves away or hesitates.

#### **Proactive Defense to Dog Attack**

Proactive defenses begin with never trying to handle an aggressive large dog without another capable handler present. It is also important to be mindful of both the dog's body language and the handler's. Handler body language suggesting fear of the dog can provoke an attack. Other proactive defenses can be nonlethal dog defense weapons. The policy of the American Veterinary Medical Association is that Electro Muscular Disruption Devices (EMDDs), also called stun guns or tasers, should not be used on any animal for routine capture or restraint. Animal control or law enforcement officers may use EMDDs with non-lethal force to respond to aggressive dogs. Sprays that use capsaicin, citronella, and similar irritants require close proximity and accurate aim. They may also infuriate an excited dog rather than deter it. Air horns can be effective deterrents at a greater distance and do not require aim. Using an air horn can also deter multiple dogs simultaneously and alert others to either help or to avoid the aggressive dog.

Another proactive defense against dog bites is to encourage the elimination of bite-provoking stimuli. Actions or circumstances that can provoke a dog to bite include being tethered on a rope or chain, teasing, taunting, play wrestling, trying to protect food or puppies, presence of a female in heat, and loud noises such as firecrackers or gun fire.

#### **Preparation for an Impending Attack**

If you anticipate being confronted with an aggressive dog, preparation for an impending attack by a large dog begins with knowing to avoid running from the dog if not absolutely positive there is time and a definitive way to escape. If an attack appears unavoidable, an obstruction (bag, backpack, umbrella, coat, bicycle, car, etc.) should be sought to be between the victim and the dog. The dog should be ordered to "BACK OFF" with a low stern voice and occasional yells for help. Wrapping an arm with a coat can help in fending off an attack. If the dog attacks an

arm, it should be kicked hard and repeatedly until it releases. A nearby stout stick or similar object should be sought that can be used to keep the dog at bay while backing toward safety. Telescoping “bite sticks” which expand from 10 inches to 2 feet are commercially available to deter bites or serve as a means of defense against dangerous dogs. A bite stick can be conveniently carried when the risk of attack by a dangerous dog is known to be high.

If there is no escape evident and no nearby object to use as a weapon, a stationary object should be grabbed to prevent the dog from knocking or pulling a victim to the ground. If knocked to the ground, a victim should curl up in fetal position and press his fists into his neck while keeping his elbows firmly against his chest and his legs curled up and held tightly together. This position will protect the carotid, brachial, and femoral arteries as well as the abdomen.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. The risks of being bitten by a strange dog are affected by its early socialization or the lack of it, subsequent handling, gender, and breed.**
- 2. Breed is a factor, among many others, in the risk of a dog seriously biting people.**
- 3. Using an air horn can deter, without proximity or aim, an aggressive strange dog while simultaneously alerting other nearby people.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my recent books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* published by CRC Press and is available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.