

Should You Kiss Your Dog?

Our topics for this week are:

- **Risks of being bitten in the face kissing dogs**
- **Risks of infection from dog saliva**

Abby knows I love dogs, especially her, but I don't kiss her. It is not that she wouldn't let me. It is because if I ingrain kissing dogs is OK in my brain, I will kiss the wrong dog at the wrong time. Therefore, I try to handle Abby as I would handle a dog I have not met before. That trains my subconscious not to take unnecessary risks with unfamiliar animals. I do the same handling my horses. I handle them in ways that would protect me if I was handling an untrained horse. In other words, "plan for the worst and hope for the best" when handling all animals. I also do not want to have someone watch me cut corners, especially children, and have them think it is OK under all circumstances.

Facial Bites

Staring at a dog is what a dominant dog would do to intimidate another dog. Dogs don't like being stared at by strangers. They also do not like being trapped with no possible emergency exit. Holding a dog and staring at it to kiss it scares most dogs and makes all dogs uncomfortable. The cause for many human facial bites by dogs is an attempt to kiss the dog.

Transmission of Disease

Dogs don't have fingers and opposable thumbs. Anything that stinks or looks weird that they want to investigate, they have to use their mouth. Some nose magnets are kitchen spills, dead birds, other dog's bottoms, dirty kitty litter, and toilet bowls..

Some infectious organisms live in a dog's saliva and some are simply carried short-term. They do not have to make the dog sick for the dog to transmit an infectious agent to a human.

The surface of intact skin is a good barrier to infections. To be transmitted to a human they have to find a portal of entry, either mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, or eyes or fresh cuts in the skin. Kissing a dog brings infectious agents in the dog's saliva near your portals of entry.

Even after entering a human the infectious agents may not cause disease in a healthy adult human, but the risk is much higher if the person exposed has an immature or suppressed immune system. This includes:

- Children less than 5 years old
- Senior citizens over 70 years old
- People with liver disease or cancer
- People on drugs to suppress autoimmune diseases

Most of the infectious agents that can be acquired from dog saliva can cause diarrhea, such as campylobacter, salmonella, and E. coli cause diarrhea. Capnocytophaga is a bacteria that resides in the dog's mouth. It can cause inflammation of the heart and septicemia (blood infection). Pasteurella is commonly in dog saliva, It can cause respiratory disease and septicemia. Streptococcus that causes strep throat does not reside in dog saliva, but it may temporarily be there if a human in the household is carrying it.

Kissing is not the only way to get dog saliva in facial mucous membranes. It can be carried to the mouth, nose, or eyes by contaminated hands. Be sure to wash hands after handling dogs and their food or food and water bowls.

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

- 1. Kissing dogs will put you at risk of being bitten in the face**
- 2. Kissing dogs can lead to illnesses such as diarrhea, sore throat, cough, or worse in humans with incompetent immune systems due to age, disease, or use of drugs.**

If you wish to comment on this episode of Better Animal Handling or on your topics of interest, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

More information on animal handling is available in my book, Animal Handling and Physical Restraint, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: www.betteranimalhandling.com

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.