

How to Defend Against a Vicious Dog Attack

Our topics for this week are:

- **Incidence of serious dog bites**
- **Preventive steps for dog bites**
- **Proactive defenses compared to reactive defenses against dog bites**

Overall Incidence of Dog Bites

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.

Steps to Avoid Dog Bites

Preventing bites includes selecting a dog appropriate for a family's living situation and family members, socializing the dog to other humans and animals in the first four months of its life, and training the dog to simple commands. The dog should also be kept on a leash in public, and owners need to avoid 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. Tethering dogs should be strictly avoided. Each dog should receive play time and short periods of training each day. Isolated dogs become irritable, unsocial dogs.

Teaching Children to Avoid Dog Bites

Supervised contact between dogs and children is beneficial to both. However, a baby or small child (less than six years old) should never be left unsupervised with a dog, particularly larger ones (more than 50 lb.). Children need to be told, and shown by example, how to properly handle dogs. No one should tease dogs by pretending to hit or kick or to take their food, toys, or treats. A dog's ears or tail should not be pulled, and dogs should not be sat on, climbed on, or ridden. Children should never approach a strange dog, nor run from or past a dog. They should

watch for and avoid unleashed dogs. If approached, a child should freeze (“be like a tree”) but not stare directly at the dog. They should count slowly to five and then slowing more away backward or sideways. They should never turn their back on the dog. Dogs that are nursing, eating, in their crate, or sleeping should not be disturbed. Dogs should not be petted without permission from its owner. Children should never reach over a fence or into a car or truck to pet a dog. If knocked down by a dog, the child should “be like a rock”, i.e., roll into a ball, cover their face and neck with their hands and arms, stay still, and not scream.

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.

Preparation for an 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. 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.

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, loud noises such as firecrackers or gun fire, or demonstrating fear. Dangerous dog legislation should also prohibit tethering which has been shown to cause dogs to be more aggressive.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

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

- 1. Do not run from a vicious dog if there is not a certain nearby means of escape.**
- 2. A pressurized air horn can be a reliable deterrent to a vicious dog attack.**
- 3. Large aggressive dogs should not be handled without another adult present.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: 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.