

American Humane Association™

The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals

Dog Bites

Dog bite statistics

- An estimated 4.7 million dog bites occur in the U.S. each year^{2,3}
- Nearly 800,000 dog bites require medical care²
- Approximately 92% of fatal dog attacks involved male dogs, 94% of which were not neutered¹
- Approximately 25% of fatal dog attacks involved chained dogs¹
- Approximately 71% of bites occur to the extremities (arms, legs, hands, feet)²
- Approximately two-thirds of bites occurred on or near the victim's property, and most victims knew the dog
- The insurance industry pays more than \$1 billion in dog-bite claims each year³
- At least 25 different breeds of dogs have been involved in the 238 dog-bite-related fatalities in the U.S.⁴
- Approximately 24% of human deaths involved unrestrained dogs off of their owners' property⁴
- Approximately 58% of human deaths involved unrestrained dogs on their owners' property⁴

→ 25 breeds.
but pit bulls
have all the
publicity.

Breed-specific legislation (BSL)

- In response to these statistics, many communities have enacted breed-specific legislation (BSL) that prohibits ownership of certain breeds, such as pit bulls, Rottweilers and others.
- Any breed of dog can bite, and research suggests BSL does little to protect the community from dog-bite incidents.
- In fact, BSL can often have unintended consequences -- such as black-market interest and indiscriminant breeding practices -- resulting in subsequent breed overpopulation that leads to increases in the number of homeless, stray and euthanized dogs.
- Enforcement of BSL has been shown to be very costly and extremely difficult to enforce. One county in Maryland spent more than \$560,000 maintaining pit bulls (not including payroll, cross-agency costs and utilities), while fees generated only \$35,000.⁵
- Responsible breeding and ownership, public education and enforcement of existing laws are the most effective ways of reducing dog bites.
- American Humane supports local legislation to protect communities from dangerous animals, but does not advocate laws that target specific breeds of dogs.

Dog bites and children

- 50% of dog attacks involved children under 12 years old¹
- 82% of dog bites treated in the emergency room involved children under 15 years old²
- 70% of dog-bite fatalities occurred among children under 10 years old⁵
- Bite rates are dramatically higher among children who are 5 to 9 years old²
- Unsupervised newborns were 370 times more likely than an adult to be killed by a dog⁵
- 65% of bites among children occur to the head and neck²
- Boys under the age of 15 years old are bitten more often than girls of the same age²

What can parents do?

- Educate your children. Studies have found that the number-one dog-bite prevention measure is education. Children who understand how to act around dogs, how to play with dogs, when to leave dogs alone and how to properly meet a dog are much less likely to be bitten. To address this need, American Humane has created American Humane KIDS: Kids Interacting with Dogs Safely™, a dog-bite prevention program specifically for children ages 4 to 7.
- Supervise your children. Unsupervised children may innocently wander too close to a dangerous situation. Eighty-eight percent of fatal dog attacks among 2-year-olds occurred when the child was left unsupervised.¹ Supervision of children, especially around dogs, is one way to help ensure they are safe.

Safe rules of behavior for kids

Don't treat a dog unkindly.

- Never hit, kick, slap or bite a dog or pull on his ears, tail or paws.

Don't bother a dog when she is busy.

- Never bother dogs with puppies or dogs that are playing with or guarding toys, eating or sleeping. Always leave service dogs alone while they are working.

Don't approach a dog you don't know.

- Never approach a dog that is tied up, behind a fence or in a car.
- If you find an animal, call the police or animal control for help.
- If you want to meet a dog, first ask the owner for permission. If the owner says it's OK, hold out your hand in a fist for the dog to sniff. If he's interested, you can give him a little scratch under the chin (not over the head) and say hello.

Do be calm.

- Always talk in a quiet voice or whisper — no shouting — and take a "time out" if you feel angry or frustrated.

Do be still.

- If a loose dog approaches you, stand still like a tree. Keep your hands at your sides, and stay quiet and calm. Look away from the dog.
- If you are on the ground, curl up into a ball, like a rock. Keep your knees to your chest and your hands over your ears. Stay quiet and calm. Look down at your knees, not at the dog.
- Always make slow movements. Set things down carefully and don't run when you're around dogs, as this gets them excited and they may accidentally hurt you.

What can dog owners do?**Spay or neuter your dog.**

Neutering reduces aggression, especially in males. Un-neutered dogs are more than 2.6 times more likely to bite than neutered dogs.³ Female dogs in heat and nursing moms are much more dangerous than spayed females, and their behavior can be unpredictable. Talk to your veterinarian to schedule an appointment, or contact your local humane organization or animal shelter for information on low-cost spay/neuter assistance.

HUGE. Spaying & neutering is huge & needs to be done.

Supervise your dog.

Dogs left on their own may feel uncertain and defensive, or even overly confident, and this poses risks to your dog, as well as to other people and dogs. Eighty-eight percent of fatal dog attacks among 2-year-olds occurred when the child was left unsupervised.¹

Train and socialize your dog.

Be sure your dog interacts with and has good manners around all members of the family, the public and other animals. Basic training is as important for the owner as it is for the dog, and socialization is the key to a well-adjusted adult dog. It is essential that puppies between 8 and 16 weeks old be exposed to a variety of people, places, dogs and other animals. As dogs age, do your best to continue their exposure to these things to ensure that they are well socialized throughout their lives.

Restrain your dog.

Twenty-four percent of fatal dog attacks involved loose dogs that were off their owner's property.⁴ Dogs that are allowed to roam loose outside the yard may perceive your entire neighborhood as their "territory" and may defend it aggressively. By obeying leash laws and taking care to properly fence your yard, you will not only be respecting the laws in your community, but you will also be helping keep your dog safe from cars, other dogs and unforeseen dangers.

Unchain your dog.

Chained dogs are 2.8 times more likely to bite.⁵ Tethering or chaining dogs increases their stress, protectiveness and vulnerability, thereby increasing the potential for aggression. Fencing is the better solution.

Resources for additional information:

[American Humane KIDS: Kids Interacting with Dogs Safety](#) dog-bite prevention program
[American Veterinary Medical Association](#)
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

¹ National Canine Research Foundation. Fatal dog attack studies. Retrieved July 14, 2009, from <http://ncrf2004.wipod.com/d48.html>

² Centers for Disease Control. (2003). Nonfatal dog bite-related injuries treated in hospital emergency departments—US 2001. *MMWR*, 52(26), 605-610.

³ Humane Society of the United States. (2005). National Pet Related Statistics. Shelter Pages, 37-38.

⁴ Sacks, J. J., Sindtari, L., Gleichert, J., Colab, G. C. & Lockwood, R. (2000). Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998. *JAVMA*, 217(6), 836-840.

⁵ Sacks, J. J., Satlin, R. W., & Borzso, S. E. (1989). Dog bite-related fatalities from 1979 through 1988. *JAVMA*, 262(11), 1489-1492.

⁶ Vicious Animal Legislation Task Force, Report of the Vicious Animal Legislation Task Force