

Training, Education can Reduce Dog Bite Incidents

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St. Charles County, Missouri – Each year, dogs bite more than 4.5 million Americans, with almost one-half of those bites involving children under 12. To draw attention to this — and to help protect you, your family and your pets from future incidents — ***National Dog Bite Prevention Week*** (recognized May 18-24 this year) focuses on suggestions for avoiding these unfortunate incidents.

Although most stories we hear imply that selected breeds are responsible for dog bites, it is important to recognize that when threatened, scared or provoked – ***ANY*** dog is capable of biting a human or other animal. In fact, most dog bites involve a family pet or an animal with which the person is familiar.

Understanding common behavior patterns and training your dog to become more comfortable in tense situations can go a long way toward minimizing opportunities where dog bites may occur. Below are just a few of the simple steps owners can take to reduce the possibilities for a dog bite:

- Consult a professional to learn about dog breeds best suited for your household.
- Arrange an interaction with children before bringing the dog to your home. Introduce the new dog to other dogs in the home (especially older dogs) in a neutral setting.
- Spay or neuter your pet, as this often reduces aggressive tendencies.
- Complete a basic behavior training and socialization course with your new pet. Do not teach your dog aggressive games (wrestling, tug-of-war, etc.)
- Never leave infants or young children alone with any dog.
- Keep your dog on a leash whenever outside a fenced area.
- Be alert for and calmly remove yourself and your dog from a potentially threatening situation.

If a bite does occur in St. Charles County, it is the responsibility of the person bitten to report the incident to the Division of Humane Services by calling 636.949.7387, a municipal Animal Control program, or the St. Charles County Sheriff's Department at 636.949.0809 (if the event occurs after normal business hours or on weekends). When reporting the incident, please include the name, address and phone number of the owner of the animal; the date, time and location of the incident; the location on the body where the person was bitten; and a general description of the biting animal. Where possible, provide information about the dog's most recent rabies vaccination, including the date of the vaccination and the name of the veterinarian.

Although an owner is responsible for controlling and socializing their dog, individuals should take steps to protect themselves around other animals. Here are a few basic safety tips for children and those uneasy with dogs that can help minimize dog bites:

- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
- Do not play with a dog unless supervised by its owner.

- Do not reach through a fence to pet a dog, even if it is familiar to you.
- Do not run from a dog or scream. Remain still until you're able to slowly back away to a safer area.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, playing with a toy, aggressive or caring for puppies.
- If you fall or are knocked to the ground during an attack, curl into a ball and cover your head and neck with your arms to help protect your face.

The Division of Humane Services protects and enhances the quality of life for people and animals in St. Charles County by sheltering and adopting animals, educating pet owners, providing animal control services, and investigating incidents involving animal cruelty and neglect. Since opening in 1999, its Pet Adoption Center has successfully placed more than 30,000 pets in new homes. In addition to pet adoptions, volunteers are requested to improve the daily operations of the shelter and positively impact the lives of animals in our community. For more information about the Division of Humane Services, please call 636.949.PETS (7387) or visit <http://health.sccmo.org>.

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