

Three Signs a Dog Is About to Bite and Five Things to Stop It

Certain weather conditions provoke more dog bites than others. And these three groups of people practically 'beg' a dog to bite. So it's critical you know how to read the signs of an impending bite, and take these actions immediately, to stop it.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Children, the elderly, and mail carriers are the most frequent victims of dog bites
- Tips for preventing your dog from becoming a biter include providing appropriate and ongoing socialization and obedience training, adequate exercise, and proactive health care
- It's important to exercise caution in specific situations, including when approaching an unfamiliar dog; when a dog is eating, sleeping or playing with a toy or bone; and when you feel a dog may be a threat

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Dog bites can and do happen ... and most are preventable. An estimated 70 million dogs live in family homes across the US, and millions of people, primarily children, are bitten each year. From the American Veterinary Medical Association:¹

- According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), dog bites were the 11th leading cause of non-fatal injury to children ages 1 to 4, 9th for ages 5 to 9, and 10th for ages 10 to 14 from 2003 to 2012.
- The Insurance Information Institute estimates that in 2013, insurers across the country paid just under \$500 million in dog bite claims.
- According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, almost 27,000 reconstructive procedures were performed in 2013 to repair injuries caused by dog bites.
- The US Postal Service reports that over 5,500 postal employees were attacked by dogs in 2013. Children, elderly, and postal carriers are the most frequent victims of dog bites.
- The American Humane Association reports that 66% of bites among children occur on the head and neck.

How to Prevent Your Dog from Becoming a Biter

- **Research the type of dog that might be best suited to your family and lifestyle before selecting a pet** — Impulse adoptions or purchases are very often a bad idea. If this is your first dog, also consider talking with a veterinarian, a well-informed shelter or rescue employee, a reputable breeder, or other knowledgeable person.
- **Insure your dog is well-socialized and trained to respond consistently to basic obedience commands like sit, stay, no, and come** — Proper and ongoing socialization is the most important thing

you can do to reduce the risk of behavior problems.

- **Provide your dog with plenty of opportunities to exercise** — Not only is regular, heart-thumping aerobic exercise necessary for physical conditioning, it also provides the mental stimulation every dog needs to be well-balanced.
- **Playtime is important, but you should avoid games that are over-stimulating to your dog or that pit him against you**, like wrestling or tug-of-war. And never put your dog in a situation where he feels taunted or threatened.
- **Always use a leash when you're out in public with your pet** — And remember that it's not enough to simply put a leash or harness on a large dog with unpredictable behavior. You must be able to control him regardless of who or what he encounters. If you can't, it's time for additional obedience training, and in the meantime, dog-walking duties should go to the person in your household who can successfully maintain control of your pet in public.
- **If you allow your dog out alone in a fenced yard, make sure gates are secure and there are no other escape routes available** — If she's a jumper, your fence must be higher than she can jump. If she's a digger or chewer, you'll need to take whatever precautions are necessary to insure she isn't able to tunnel her way out of your yard.
- **Take proactive care of your pet's health** — Feed a balanced, species-appropriate diet, make sure she is well-exercised, brush her teeth, bathe, and groom her regularly, and take her for annual wellness visits with your veterinarian.
- **Proceed with caution when it comes to vaccinating your pet** — Evidence is mounting that the rabies vaccine in particular is contributing to aggression in some dogs. Since rabies vaccines are required by law, insist on the 3-year vaccine and avoid the 1-year shot. Ask your holistic vet for the homeopathic rabies vaccine detox Lyssin after each rabies vaccine.
- **Also, discuss with your vet the best time to spay or neuter your dog** — Beyond reproductive concerns, intact pets are sometimes more aggressive than animals that have been neutered. It is not recommended to leave a dog with aggressive tendencies intact, but it's also not advisable to follow a cookie-cutter approach to neutering all puppies. Timing of this procedure is critical, and should be decided upon based on each dog's health status and personality.
- **Teach children — yours and any others who come around your dog — how to behave with an animal** — Children are by far the most frequent victims of dog bites. They must learn to be both cautious and respectful in the presence of any dog, including their own. And never under any circumstances leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.

More Pointers for Dog Guardians

Just as a child's behavior is different than an adult's, your puppy's behavior will change as he matures. As he develops physically and socially, his conduct will also transform in subtle and perhaps not-so-subtle ways. Don't assume, even if you've done an excellent job socializing and training him, that he is a "finished product." Lifelong learning, socialization, and mental stimulation are essential if your pet is to become and remain a balanced individual.

Ongoing training and proactive behavior modification when a problem might be developing will prevent any burgeoning issues of aggressiveness.

Dogs often need a refresher obedience or socialization course between 2-3 years of age. If you aren't completely

pleased with any of your dog's behaviors, stick with training until she gets there.

If you adopt a dog, especially a puppy, during the colder months of the year, he'll need to be socialized once warm weather arrives to all the sights, sounds, and other stimuli of summer.

Dog bites are more common in hot weather. This is probably because more children are outdoors playing with their pets, coupled with dogs becoming irritable and aggressive in the heat.

Exercise Caution in These Situations

Be careful when approaching a strange dog. Don't try to pet any dog before he sees you and sniffs you. Don't turn your back to an unfamiliar dog or try to run away. The natural instinct of many dogs will be to give chase.

Don't attempt to interact with a dog that is sleeping, eating, playing with a toy or bone, or a mother who is with her puppies. Signs a dog is about to bite:

- She suddenly freezes and holds her body rigid
- She stands with her front legs splayed and her head low, looking at you
- She curls her lip to show teeth

If you feel a dog is a threat:

- Stand motionless with your hands at your sides
- Avoid eye contact with the dog
- If the dog loses interest, back away slowly
- If the dog comes at you anyway, offer him anything you're holding — a purse or jacket, for example — or anything that may distract him
- If you wind up on the ground, curl into a ball, put your hands over your ears and stay still — resist the urge to yell, scream, or move around

Sources and References

¹ [AVMA.org](https://www.avma.org)
