

# Prevent Dog Bites By Becoming More Aware

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*St. Charles County, Missouri* – Each year, dogs bite more than 4.5 million Americans, and nearly 900,000 of those bites require medical treatment as a result. Despite common belief, most bites involve dogs with whom the bitten person is familiar — including the family pet.

To help educate and protect the public, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the United States Postal Service, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention founded National Dog Bite Prevention Week (recognized May 19-25 this year), which focuses on suggestions for avoiding these unfortunate incidents. Familiarizing yourself and your family with 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.

"Pets are an important part of our families, but they need proper supervision," St. Charles County Division of Humane Services Director Theresa Williams said. "Part of the agreement in becoming a responsible pet owner is that you'll take extra efforts to make sure your dog is a good citizen. Dog bites have become a too common reality, but through behavioral instruction and positive reinforcement, owners can help their dogs develop into the loving family members we all desire."

There are some simple steps to reduce the possibilities for a dog bite:

Consult a professional to learn about suitable dog breeds for your household.

Spend time with a dog before acquiring it, and use caution when bringing a dog into the home of a young child.

Spay or neuter your pet, as this usually reduces aggressive tendencies.

Complete a basic behavior training and socialization course with your new pet. Do not teach your dog aggressive games (i.e. 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.

Calmly remove yourself and your dog from a threatening situation.

Following these suggestions is especially important in Missouri, where pet owners are responsible for any injuries or damages their dog may cause. In addition to financial responsibilities, pet owners must follow local and state ordinances regarding vaccinations to minimize the risks for rabies and other diseases.

Although the responsibility of control is focused on the pet owner, it is important for individuals to protect themselves around animals. Here are a few basic safety tips for children and those uneasy with dogs that will help minimize dog bites:

Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.

Do not run from a dog or scream.

Do not play with a dog unless supervised by its owner.

Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.

Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, aggressive or caring for puppies.

Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.

If approached by an unfamiliar or aggressive dog, remain still until you're able to slowly back away to a safer area.

If bitten, immediately report the bite to the owner and the nearest authority.

Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to authorities — in St. Charles County, you may call 636.949.7387.

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/health/>.

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