

April 7-13, 2019 is National Dog Bite Awareness Week and with over 78 million dogs living in US households preventing dog bites is quite important. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association there were 4.5 million dog bites in 2018. The Insurance Information Institute reported that homeowners' insurance companies paid out \$675 Million in 2018 for liability claims from dog bites and dog-related injuries and the average claim for a dog bite injury in 2018 was \$39,017. Important to note is that "the average cost per claim nationally has risen more than 90 percent from 2003 to 2017, due to increased medical costs as well as the size of settlements, judgments and jury awards given to plaintiffs." Children, the elderly and Postal Carriers are the most common victims of dog bites. Over 6000 U.S. Postal Carriers were bitten in 2018 and most dog bites affecting young children occur during everyday activities and while interacting with familiar dogs. Sadly the majority of reconstructive surgeries to treat dog bites are performed on children according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

Education and awareness are important in preventing dog bites and heeding the cautions can help in reducing the trauma of a dog bite for owner and non-owner alike.

IF YOU ARE BITTEN, THINGS YOU SHOULD DO:

- If the dog's owner is present, request proof of rabies vaccination, and get the owner's name and contact information.
- Clean the bite wound with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Consult your doctor immediately or go to the emergency room if it's after office hours.
- Contact the dog's veterinarian to check vaccination records.

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

- Be cautious around strange dogs, and treat your dog with respect.
- Because children are the most common victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should:
 - o NEVER leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
 - o Be alert for potentially dangerous situations.
 - o Teach children - including toddlers - to be careful around pets.
 - o Children must learn not to approach strange dogs or try to pet dogs through fences.
 - o Teach children to ask permission from the dog's owner before petting the dog.

WHAT'S A DOG OWNER TO DO?

- Carefully select your pet. Puppies should not be obtained on impulse.
- Make sure your pet is socialized as a young puppy so it feels at ease around people and other animals.
- Don't put your dog in a position where it feels threatened or teased.
- Be calm. Always talk in a quiet voice or whisper -- no shouting -- and take a "time out" if you feel angry or frustrated.
- Train your dog. Basic commands help dogs understand what is expected of them and help build a bond of trust between pets and people.
- Walk and exercise your dog regularly to keep it healthy and provide mental stimulation.
- Avoid highly excitable games like wrestling or tug of war.
- Use a leash in public to ensure you are able to control your dog.
- Keep your dog healthy. Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and other preventable infectious diseases.
- If you have a fenced yard, make sure your gates are secure.
- Neuter your pet. According to the National Canine Research Foundation, approximately 92 percent of fatal dog attacks involved male dogs, 94 percent of which were not neutered.