

# BULLETIN

*Risk Control*

ACWA/Joint Powers Insurance Authority, 5620 Birdcage Street, Suite 200, Citrus Heights, CA 95610-7632, (800) 231-5742

by Keith Forbes

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## How to Prevent Dog Attacks

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, estimates that nearly 4.7 million people are bitten by a dog each year, half of those are children. Of those 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites; 386,000 require treatment in an emergency department and about a dozen die. Dogs have evolved considerably since the time when they hunted and killed for food. However, they still have the ability and inclination to attack in certain circumstances. Most people are bitten by dogs because they misread the dog's intentions, or react the wrong way when the dog approaches.

### Why Dogs May Attack

Dogs have poor eyesight and, therefore, have to come very close to assess something. A dog seeing something moving past his yard will most likely bark and growl, which is his way of instilling fear in his foe. Often a low, guttural growl is the first indication that a dog is upset by a visitor, followed by aggressive barking and running toward the person or animal. A dog that cowers in a corner or shies away, is warning you not to approach.

But all dogs are not the same, and they attack for many reasons. Every dog has the potential to bite. Some will just bark, some will threaten but not bite, and some will attack, especially if you do anything provocative.



Some dogs are curious: Who is this strange person in these strange clothes! Once they have met you, they never bother you again.



Some want to chase and run. These dogs may bark and run after you, but they're just having fun. Some are pretending that they are hunting. These dogs will try to stop a bike for example, but they will do no harm.

But all dogs are territorial animals, and they may naturally develop protective behavior against people or other animals nearing their home. They may bite to protect their territory (or their owners, or a toy, or food); or out of fear, or to establish their dominance over the person bitten.

### How to Avoid an Attack

Avoid eye contact! This is the number one thing to remember. It can prevent an attack. Dogs feel as though you're challenging them when you make direct eye contact with them.

Do not run past or away from a dog. It is a dog's natural instinct to chase prey. If a dog approaches to sniff you, stay still. In most cases, the dog will go away when it determines you are not a threat. A dog will interpret your body language and voice tone in the only way he knows how, and that is by his canine instinct. If you kick or threaten the dog it may trigger aggressive behavior.

If a dog's ears are back, its tail down and its legs stiff, do not approach. That's a sure sign that it doesn't want to be approached. If its head is down, it is almost a sure thing it is going to attack.

Never approach a strange dog, especially one who's tied or confined behind a fence or in a car.

Don't pet a dog—even your own—without letting him see and sniff you first. Even some dogs that appear friendly might not like being touched. Don't disturb a dog while it's sleeping, eating, chewing on a toy, or caring for puppies.

### What to Do When Attacked

Even if you have done all things right, an aggressive dog may continue to threaten an attack. This is a dangerous situation, but you need to keep a cool head. When avoidance does not work, you must take measures to protect yourself.

Don't run. The best way to avoid an attack by a dog you see running at you is to stand totally still. Do not move a muscle.

Put something in front of you. For instance, if you're on bike, place the bike between you and the dog. You may also feed him books, your purse, jacket or any other item you are carrying to avoid being bitten. An umbrella is a handy thing to have in a dog situation. You may open the umbrella abruptly, as this will often scare the dog away, or he may bite it instead of you. Some meter readers carry a stick with a ball attached to the end. But do not use your arm to distance yourself; you reaching out toward the dog could make it snap at you and bite.



If you feel as though the attack is inevitable then be prepared. Pick up something solid such as a tree limb or pole to place in front of yourself in case the dog bites. If it does bite, it will bite down on the object you have in your hand and not you! Don't try to harm the dog too badly by swinging the object too hard. Do what you have to, to protect yourself.

Get up. If you feel you have the speed to make it to the nearest car or gate, etc., get to it and climb

on top of it. A lot of dogs have excellent jumping skills so try to get as high as you can. Even a tree would work in this case. If you feel as though you're never going to be able to get down, shout for help.

Curl up. If you're knocked to the ground, get on your stomach and ball up real tight bringing your knees up to your chest. Put your hands on the back of your neck, and protect your face and ears. Be solid like a rock and don't wave your arms, giving them something to bite.

### What to Do If Bitten

If you are bitten or attacked by a dog, try not to panic.

- Immediately wash the wound thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- Contact your physician for additional care and advice. If at work contact your employer, and report it as an industrial injury.
- Report the bite to your local animal care and control agency. Tell the animal control official everything you know about the dog, including his owner's name and the address where he lives. If the dog is a stray, tell the animal control official what he looks like, where you saw him, whether you've seen him before, and in which direction he went.

### Children's Safety

Just as we teach our children to practice safety in other situations, we can teach them to be safe around dogs. The most important lesson for children to learn is not to chase or tease dogs they know, and to avoid dogs they don't know. A simple internet search will produce numerous websites that address children's safety around dogs.

(Sources: [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov); [www.HSUS.org](http://www.HSUS.org); [www.eHow.com](http://www.eHow.com); and [www.notelay.com](http://www.notelay.com))



#### **Risk Management Staff**

Walter "Andy" Sells, Chief Financial & Operations Officer  
Keith Forbes, Senior Risk Management Consultant  
John Haaf, Senior Risk Management Consultant  
Peter Kuchinsky II, Senior Risk Management Consultant  
Lee Patton, Senior Risk Management Consultant  
R. Scott Wood, Risk Management Consultant  
Terry Lofing, Administrative Assistant II