

Tips to Avoid Dog Bites

American Veterinary Medical Association offers tips for Dog Bite Prevention Week.

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The 15th annual National Dog Bite Prevention Week, from May 17 through 23, offers an opportunity to educate the public on how to properly approach and interact with dogs in order to avoid severe injury.

It's estimated that 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs every year, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. Most, the AVMA says, are preventable through selecting the right pet, proper training, responsible approaches to animal control and education.

The most common victims of dog bites are children, followed by the elderly and mail carriers. Teaching people how to communicate with and properly interact with dogs is the best way to avoid dog bites, said Dr. James Cook, AVMA president.

Dog bite prevention tips from the AVMA include the following: When selecting a pet, choose a dog that fits the family's lifestyle. Consult a veterinarian for help. Socialize pets. Gradually expose a puppy to different people and animals so he feels at ease in various situations; continue this exposure as the dog gets older. Don't put a dog in a situation where he feels threatened or teased. Avoid aggressive play. Train the dog. Obedience training helps dogs understand what is expected of them and builds a bond of trust between dog and owner. Keep pets healthy. Vaccinate dogs against rabies and other preventable infectious diseases. Spay or neuter pets. Science suggests neutered dogs may be less likely to bite. Teach kids to ask a dog owner for permission before petting any dog. Never leave a baby or child alone with a dog. Before a person touches a dog, let the dog sniff the person or child first before they pet him gently, avoiding the face and tail. Never bother a dog while sleeping, eating or caring for puppies. Do not run past a dog. If threatened by a dog, stay calm. Avoid eye contact. Stand still or back away slowly until the dog leaves. If knocked down by the dog, curl into a ball and protect the face area with arms and fists.

If bitten, get proof of rabies vaccination from the dog's owner, get the owner's name and contact information, and contact the dog's veterinarian to check vaccination records. Then immediately consult a doctor. Clean bite wound(s) with soap and water as soon as possible.