

Man and woman's best friend bites more than 4.7 million people a year, and key experts believe that public education can help prevent these bites. The third full week of May is National Dog Bite Prevention Week, and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the United States Postal Service, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are each working to educate Americans about dog bite prevention. [Learn about Rabies: What it is and what you can do about it](#)

Each year, 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites; half of these are children. Of those injured, 386,000 require treatment in an emergency department and about a dozen die. The rate of dog bite-related injuries is highest for children ages 5 to 9 years, and the rate decreases as children age. Almost two thirds of injuries among children ages four years and younger are to the head or neck region. Injury rates in children are significantly higher for boys than for girls. (See [CDC MMWR article](#).)



CDC is committed to reducing this public health problem by working with state health departments to establish dog bite prevention programs and by tracking and reporting trends on U.S. dog bite injuries. Dog bites are a largely preventable public health problem, and adults and children can learn to reduce their chances of being bitten.

### **Things to Consider Before You Get a Dog**

- **Consult with a professional (e.g., veterinarian, animal behaviorist, or responsible breeder) to learn about suitable breeds of dogs for your household.**
- **Dogs with histories of aggression are inappropriate in households with children.**
- **Be sensitive to cues that a child is fearful or apprehensive about a dog and, if so, delay acquiring a dog.**
- **Spend time with a dog before buying or adopting it. Use caution when bringing a dog into the home of an infant or toddler. Spay/neuter virtually all dogs (this frequently reduces aggressive tendencies).**
- **Never leave infants or young children alone with any dog.**
- **Do not play aggressive games with your dog (e.g., wrestling).**
- **Properly socialize and train any dog entering the household. Teach the dog submissive behaviors (e.g., rolling over to expose abdomen and relinquishing food without growling).**
- **Immediately seek professional advice (e.g., from veterinarians, animal behaviorists, or responsible breeders) if the dog develops aggressive or undesirable behaviors.**

## Preventing Dog Bites

Teach children basic safety around dogs and review regularly:

- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
  - Do not run from a dog and scream.
  - Remain motionless (e.g., "be still like a tree") when approached by an unfamiliar dog.
  - If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still (e.g., "be still like a log").
  - Do not play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
  - Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.
  - Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
  - Do not disturb a dog who is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
  - Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
  - If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.
- A CDC study on fatal dog bites lists the breeds involved in fatal attacks over 20 years ([Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998](#)). It does not identify specific breeds that are most likely to bite or kill, and thus is not appropriate for policy-making decisions related to the topic. Each year, 4.7 million Americans are bitten by dogs. These bites result in approximately 16 fatalities; about 0.0002 percent of the total number of people bitten. These relatively few fatalities offer the only available information about breeds involved in dog bites. There is currently no accurate way to identify the number of dogs of a particular breed, and consequently no measure to determine which breeds are more likely to bite or kill.

Many practical alternatives to breed-specific policies exist and hold promise for preventing dog bites. For prevention ideas and model policies for control of dangerous dogs, please see the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions: [A community approach to dog bite prevention](#). \*