

Dog Bite Alert – Avoiding Dog Bites

Date: April 21, 2016

NITHA has been monitoring the number of dog bites and has seen an increase in dog bites in the summer months. This year we would like to send out a few tips to help people understand when a dog might bite a human. The bites can be painful and the victim may need rabies vaccination, which is a number of relatively painful injections.

In the past 4 years we have seen an average of 146 animal bites per year. This resulted in 8 people per year being advised to receive rabies vaccination.

Rabies is not the only concern after an animal bite but it is potentially fatal. Tularemia and infection of the wound are also possible.

An animal that has bitten a human MUST be kept alive and its health monitored for 10 days.

Situations to avoid:

- Do not approach/pet a dog that has just had puppies. Females that have puppies are very protective of their young. Female dogs known to the family for some time will still become very protective of their young.
- Do not pet an animal that is eating or move their food or come between them and their food. Dogs can be very aggressive if they think their food is being moved or taken away. This can happen even with an older familiar dog.
- Children should be watched to make sure they are not playing near a biting dog or a mom with puppies.
- Do not enter into a small space with a dog. Even if the dog is known to you they may feel trapped in a small space and lash out.
- Children should be taught not to hurt dogs. Pulling of tails and ears or sitting on the dog can cause them to lash out and bite.
- Do not interfere in a dog fight, you are highly likely to be injured.
- If a stray animal approaches, do not challenge/approach it, allow it to move freely.
- Contact your health care centre if someone has been bitten by an animal, particularly if the animal appeared ill or if the bite was unprovoked.

If someone is bitten:

- Wash the wound out with soap and water and thoroughly rinse it.
- Report the dog bite to your local health center. This is very important if you believe the bite was unprovoked or if you believe the animal was not well. Scratches are also reportable but they are a lower risk for rabies.
- Bites are considered puncture wounds and will likely not require stitches.
- The victim may receive a tetanus vaccine update after an animal bite.
- Watch the bite over the next few days for signs of infection such as swelling, redness and heat. If these occur, go to the health center medical treatment.

Dog owners:

- Dog owners should be responsible for the feeding of their pet but also its health and safety.
- Dogs should be tied up or behind a good fence to stop it from being injured by another animal or a vehicle. Keeping the animal safe will also help reduce unwanted puppies and diseases.
- Have your pet vaccinated - particularly against rabies - when and where possible.
- Ask your band council to adopt an animal bylaw to ensure all dogs are controlled and healthy..

It is critical to remember that if an animal has bitten a human, it MUST be retained and monitored for 10 days. If after 10 days the owner wishes to destroy the animal it would be at their own expense. The RCMP are not able to destroy animals unless they are currently threatening the life of a human. However, an animal should always be monitored for 10 days post bite in case it develops symptoms of rabies (abnormal behavior, frothing at the mouth and lethargy). Monitoring an animal properly, saves the human from a painful series of immunizations.

For more information, contact the NITHA Environmental Health Advisor at (306) 953–5028 or your community Health Center.