



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama observes Dog Bite Prevention Week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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May 8-12, 2006, has been designated Dog Bite Prevention Week in Alabama.

The Alabama Department of Public Health reminds you that dog bites are a serious health problem. In health care costs alone, the estimated 800,000 dog bites that require medical attention each year in the nation include 2 percent of all emergency room visits and medical costs are over \$70 million annually.

Statistics indicate that half of all children are bitten by age 12, and two-thirds of all persons bitten are under age 20. Two times as many men as women are bitten by dogs and two times as many women as men are bitten by cats. Of the animals involved in bites 84 percent are dogs; 10 percent are cats and 6 percent are other animals.

When all bites are taken into consideration 10 percent of dog bites are from strays, 16 percent are the owner's pet; and 74 percent of all bites are from someone else's pet. Seventy percent of bites are on the extremities; 11 percent are disfiguring wounds to the face. About a dozen people die each year from dog bites.

Dog bites are a preventable public health problem. Adults and children can learn how to reduce their chances of being bitten.

Important tips to prevent dog bites:

- * Realize that there is no such thing as a "bad breed" of dog. All dogs can bite if provoked.
- * Carefully consider pet selection and consult a veterinarian.
- * Socialize your dog so it feels at ease around strangers and other animals. Do not put your dog in a position where it feels threatened and teased.
- * Train your dog to respond to basic commands.
- * Keep your dog healthy and have it vaccinated against rabies annually.
- * Be alert to signs your dog is uncomfortable or feeling aggressive.

* Have your dog spayed or neutered. Dogs which are spayed or neutered are three times less likely to bite than intact dogs.

Methods to protect yourself and your family from dog bites:

* Never leave an infant or small child alone with a dog.

* Be on the lookout for potentially dangerous situations (i.e. dog is eating, sleeping, other dogs/animals in area).

* Teach young children to be careful around pets. Children should be taught not to approach strange dogs and to ask permission from a dog's owner before petting the dog.

* Never disturb a dog that is caring for puppies, sleeping or eating.

* Avoid rough play with a dog.

* If a dog approaches to sniff you, stay still. In most cases, the dog goes away when it determines you are not a threat.

* If a dog threatens you, remain calm. Do not scream or run. If you say anything, speak calmly and firmly. Avoid eye contact. Try to stay until the dog leaves, or back away slowly until the dog is out of sight. Again, do not turn and run.

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