

Question: I heard that children are common victims of dog bites. We have a lot of dogs in the neighborhood. How do I protect them from becoming a statistic?

Answer: Each year, more than 4.5 million people in the United States are bitten by dogs. Most dog bites affecting young children occur during everyday activities and while interacting with familiar dogs. Their bite wounds are usually to the head and neck. There are many things you can do to avoid dog bites, ranging from properly training and socializing your pet to educating your children on how, and if, they should approach a dog.

As a pet owner, there are things you can do to help prevent dog bites. It is important to carefully select your pet and make sure your dog is socialized as a young puppy. Gradually expose your puppy to a variety of situations under controlled circumstances; continue that exposure on a regular basis as your pet gets older. If you have children and are considering getting a dog, it is recommended that you wait until the youngest child is at least 4 years old. Be a responsible pet owner. Obey leash laws and check fences and gates to your yard. Dogs are social animals and spending time with your pet is important. Walk and exercise your dog to keep it healthy and provide mental stimulation. Be alert and know your dog. If you see signs that your dog is uncomfortable or is behaving aggressively, find a way to change the situation.

It is important for you and your children to know how to act around dogs. Be cautious around strange dogs and treat your own pets with respect. Teach your children to ask permission from a dog's owner before petting a dog. Never run past a dog- this may cause them to chase you. Never reach through a fence to pet a dog as this may be perceived as a threat to a dog. If a dog approaches you, stand still. The dog will often walk away if it determines you are not a threat. If you feel scared by a dog, remain calm. Do not yell or scream. Avoid eye contact and resist the urge to turn and run. If you are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your head and neck. Always protect your face. Never take food or toys away from a dog.

Preventing dog bites is everyone's responsibility. Read this article with your family and identify ways you can help to reduce your risk of being bitten. Visit our website and facebook page for more information!