

How Can Pest Control Technicians Avoid Being Bitten By A Dog?



Chris Gorham

Loss Control Manager



Each day about 1,000 people in U.S. require emergency care treatment for serious dog bite injuries. Annually, about 9,500 people are hospitalized due to dog bite injuries. In an 11-year period of 2005 through 2015, canines killed 360 people in the U.S. Pit bulls contributed to 64% (232) of these deaths. Combined, pit bulls and rottweilers contributed to 76% of the total recorded deaths.

Pest Control Technicians enter customer homes, yards and garages on a daily basis. A majority of these homes will have dogs present on the premises. The owners may or may not be home, and the dogs may or may not be secured away. Pest Control Technicians are exposed to potential dog bite injuries in these scenarios, and they need to understand the hazard and how to prevent being injured.

Why do dogs bite?

Dogs bite for all sorts of reasons, some very simple, some complex. They could be protecting their property (their home or their puppies), sometimes they could be eating dinner and protecting food. They could be protecting a toy that's especially important to them or it could be for reasons that are difficult to identify, such as they weren't properly socialized with people or other dogs. It could be from being continuously chained. It could be that they weren't trained by their owner to look to people for guidance on how to behave and it could be a combination of all of those.

What kind of dogs should you stay away from? Is it just the big dogs?

No, that is a very common misconception. Most times people want a list of ten breeds that they should stay away from, and that's really not something that you can accurately do because any dog can bite. Small dogs, just by their size, are probably going to do less damage if they bite, but they still bite.

How can you avoid being bitten by a dog?

- You should never approach a strange dog you don't know, especially one who's tied up or confined behind a fence or in a car.
- Don't reach out to pet a dog, even your own, without letting him or her see and sniff you first.
- Don't disturb a dog while he or she is sleeping, eating, chewing on a toy, or caring for puppies.
- Don't chase or torment a dog, or do things like sticking your fingers through a fence.
- If a dog is approaching you, and you feel afraid, don't run. Never turn your back to a dog and run away because a dog will catch you. A dog's natural instinct is to chase and catch fleeing prey and you can never outrun a dog. The best thing to do is to be like a tree and stand still. Often a dog just wants to investigate you. If they sniff you well, then they will either leave, or if they don't, once they've had a good sniff you can very slowly start backing away.

Always be aware of your body language when you are around a dog.

Given conflicting verbal and physical messages, a dog will always attach greater importance to the physical messages. Remember that a dog may interpret your body language in different context than you intend.

- Avoid physical movements that a dog might find threatening including: staring directly into the eyes, reaching over the head (event to attach a leash), stepping over the dog, leaning or pushing on the back, neck, or head, or pushing down on the rump.
- Additionally, refrain from using quick or jerky movements. Never try to restrain a dog by holding the dog's collar; use a leash!

What are the warning signs of a dog getting ready to bite?

Watch the dog's body language. Never rely on a dog's tail to assess its state of mind. A wagging tail merely means that the dog is willing to interact. A dog who feels threatened will continue to wag its tail, but it will hold it lower and may wag it slower. A wagging tail could be good or bad! Instead, take into account **all** aspects of the dog's body language. Be wary around any dog whose demeanor includes staring, dilated pupils, wide-legged or stiff stance, lowered head, piloerection (raised hair along neck, back, or tail), bared teeth, growling, laid back ears, or a general stiffening of the body. If you observe a dog showing any of the above behaviors towards you, move slowly and quietly away from the dog keeping your side facing the dog and your eyes averted.



What should I do if I think a dog may attack?

- Never scream and run. Remain motionless, hands at your sides, and avoid eye contact with the dog.
- Remain motionless with your hands at your sides until the dog loses interest in you, then slowly back away until he or she is out of site.
- If the dog does attack, "feed" him or her your jacket, shirt or anything that you can put between yourself and the dog.
- If you fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your ears and remain motionless. Try not to scream or roll around.

How should I treat a dog bite?



Although you can provide basic first aid for a dog bite, it is very important to see a doctor, especially if an unfamiliar dog bit you, the bite is deep, you can't stop the bleeding, or there are any signs of infection (redness, swelling, warmth, pus). Dog bites can cause infections that need to be treated with antibiotics.

Basic first aid treatment includes:

- Place a clean towel over the injury to stop any bleeding.
- Try to keep the injured area elevated.
- Wash the bite carefully with soap and water.
- Apply a sterile bandage to the wound.
- Apply antibiotic ointment to the injury every day to prevent infection.

When you visit the doctor, be prepared to answer a few questions, including:

- Do you know the owner of the dog?
- If so, is the dog up to date on all vaccinations, including rabies?
- Did the bite occur because the dog was provoked, or was the dog unprovoked?
- What health conditions do you have? People with diabetes, liver disease, illnesses that suppress the immune system, and other health conditions may be at greater risk for a more severe infection.

What corporate customer policy should be developed and implemented to protect Pest Control Technicians against dog attacks?

- When making or confirming an appointment over the phone with a customer, ask if they have any dogs. If it is determined that a customer does have dogs, ask that all dogs be secured and restrained away from the work areas prior to your arrival and during your visit.
- Upon arrival to an appointment, determine if dogs are present at the home prior to entering the home, garage or yard areas. If dogs are present, verify and confirm that the dogs are secured away and restrained from the work areas. If the dogs are found to be unsecured and unrestrained, ask the customer to secure and restrain the dogs away from the work areas.
- Establish a corporate policy that states a Pest Control Technician cannot come onto the customer premises to do work unless all dogs are secured and restrained away from the work areas.
- Equip all service vehicles with basic first aid kits.