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Biting Like Cats & Dogs!

By Dr. Stuart Mitchell

Costing more than \$50 million annually within the US, cat and dog bites make up 1% of emergency room visits. Nearly 4.5 million Americans are bitten annually. Most bite victims are children and most bites result from dogs. One in five dog bites results in injuries serious enough to require medical attention. Whether from a companion animal, a neighborhood stray, or a feral animal, they are biting like cats and dogs.



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When considering animal bites, rabies is always a concern. The good news is that in the United States rabies is rare in cats and dogs. If at the time of the bite event the cat or dog was visually healthy, it is improbable the animal had rabies. One should take precautions when bitten.

If the owner of the offending animal is known, inquire to see vaccination records. Quarantine for 10 days may still be required for an observably healthy animal with up to date and complete vaccinations. If the animal manifests pathology during the 10-day period, a veterinarian will test for rabies. A series of rabies shots will be required for the bite victim if the animal tests positive.

Rabies shots are referred to as "post-exposure prophylaxis." A physician will administer 2 shots as chronologically close to the bite event as possible. Three more shots will be administered over the following 14-days.

If bitten, the victim should...

- Call 911, go to the emergency room, or contact a physician immediately, if a serious bite.
- Softly cleanse the wound with soap and water.
- With a clean towel, apply pressure to stop any bleeding.
- Apply a sterile bandage to cover the wound.
- In order to slow inflammation and prevent infection, keep the injured area elevated above the level of the heart.
- Twice daily, apply an antibiotic ointment to the wound until healed.

If bitten, the physician will...

- Examine the wound for nerve damage, tendon damage, bone injury, and infection.
- With a special solution, irrigate the wound and remove any damaged tissue.
- Often leave the wound open to heal, although the wound may be closed to reduce infection risk.
- Possibly prescribe an antibiotic.
- Administer a tetanus shot if the last was greater than 5 years previous or unknown.

- Schedule a follow-up appointment in 1 to 2 days to determine wound healing progress.
- Report the animal bite as required by law in most states.

To prevent biting like cats and dogs...

- Never leave a young child alone with a pet.
- Do not try to separate fighting animals (bites will result).
- Avoid visibly ill animals and unknown animals.
- Leave animals alone while they are eating.
- Keep pets on a leash when in public.
- Select a pet carefully and keep vaccinations up-to-date.
- Provide pets with routine veterinary health examinations.

With the weather getting colder outdoors, pets will be staying longer indoors, resulting in more "piddles" between doors." Take the pain out of stains with your Piddle Pal.



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