

# Dog Bites

A dog attack includes a dog aggressively rushing at or attempting to attack a person or animal as well as tearing clothing, biting or causing physical injury.

[www.iccwa.org.au](http://www.iccwa.org.au)

## Quick facts

- Almost 1,400 Australians are hospitalised per year from a dog bite<sup>1</sup>.
- Children 0-4 years have the highest rate of serious injury, particularly facial injuries<sup>2</sup>.
- The home is the most common location where dog bite injury occurs<sup>2</sup>.
- Almost 50% of injuries are inflicted by family pets.

## Dog ownership and the law in WA

The Dog Act 1976 is enforced by local governments who may enforce other laws in addition to this act.

- Dog owners face a \$10,000 fine and/or 12 months imprisonment if their dog attacks another person or animal and is unprovoked.
- Local governments may seek a court order for a dog to be destroyed if it has attacked and caused injury or damage.
- If your dog attacks a person or another animal, you will be held responsible even if you are not there at the time. The only exemption is if the dog is provoked.



- Dog owners can be given an on the spot fine of \$100 and up to \$1,000 if their dog is unleashed (except in designated exercise areas).

## Preventing dog bites

Everyone in our community has a role to play in preventing dog bites.

### Tradespeople and health professionals:

Talk to your clients prior to entering their backyard. Ask if they have a dog and whether it will be outside.

### Dog owners and community members:

Parents, educate yourself and your children about the correct behaviour around animals.

Display appropriate signage, warning visitors of your dog.

Ensure fences are secure and well maintained to make sure your dog does not escape or another dog is not able to intrude.

Make sure your dog is on a leash at all times, even if you believe it is harmless.

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## Choosing a dog

People choose to have a dog for different reasons. For some, it is about companionship, for others it may be for home security. Whatever your reason, make sure you do your own research.

For specific information about dog breeds in Australia visit: [http://www.iams.com.au/module-LM-breed\\_guide\\_dog.html](http://www.iams.com.au/module-LM-breed_guide_dog.html)

## Restricted breeds

All restricted breeds must be muzzled, leashed and controlled by a physically capable adult at all times. They must be sterilised, except under extenuating circumstances such as the physical health of the dog.

The following breeds (and any dog or mixed breed that visibly contains any of these breeds) are restricted in Western Australia:

- Dogo Argentino (Argentinean Fighting Dog).
- Fila Brasileiro (Brazilian Fighting Dog).
- Japanese Tosa.
- American Pit Bull Terrier and Pit Bull Terrier Breeds.
- Perro de Presa Canario or Presa Canario.

## Safety tips for children

- Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Do not play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.
- Do not pat a dog without asking the owner first and letting the animal sniff you first<sup>3</sup>.

For children specific resources and information, please contact Kidsafe WA on 08 9340 8509 or 1800 802 244 (country callers) or visit [www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au).

## Dog training tips

- Puppies should not be permitted to sleep on their owners' bed.
- Owners should make every effort to modify the behaviour of puppies that show aggression over food and toys in the first two months of ownership.
- Veterinarians should offer effective behavioural changing strategies to owners of dogs who find their puppy too excitable.
- Children of any age should not be permitted near a dog whenever food (including human food) is present.
- De-sexing does not guarantee a reduction in aggression, but parents with young children are advised to choose a female<sup>4</sup>.

## Information and support

RSPCA: 08 9209 9300 OR  
08 9209 9325 (education)

## Puppy training

Puppies have a 'critical socialisation period' from about 3-17 weeks of age. This is the time when they need to socialise with other dogs in order to learn social cues and how to communicate well with other dogs. Make sure classes use only positive reinforcement training and kindness as the basis of their training philosophy<sup>5</sup>. To find a puppy school in your area contact:

RSPCA: 08 9209 9309

The Canine Association of WA/Dogs West: 08 9455 1188

## References

1. Bennett, P & Righetti, J 2001, *The delta dog safe™ strategy, in proceedings of the 2001 annual urban animal management conference*, Melbourne.
2. Ozanne-Smith, J, Ashby, K & Stathakis, VZ 2007, Dog bite and injury prevention – analysis, critical review and research agenda, *Injury Prevention*, vol. 7, pp. 321-26.
3. Vets Alliance Pty Ltd 2007, Family safety – *Protect your family from dog bites*, Adelaide Animal Hospital, South Australia, <<http://www.adelaidevet.com.au/protecting-you-and-your-family-dog-bites>>.
4. Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit 2009, *Unintentional dog bit injury in Victoria: 2005-7*, Monash University Accident Research Centre, Victoria, <<http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/VISU/hazard/Haz.pdf>>.
5. RSPCA Australia <<http://www.rspca.org.au/>>

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ICCWA is the peak not for profit organisation involved in injury prevention and community safety promotion in Western Australia. Our mission is to reduce the incidence of injuries and their effects on the community.