

## What diseases can you get from dog bites?

Dog bites can not only cause injury but can also spread germs. Up to 18% of dog bites become infected. Over 60 different kinds of bacteria have been found in dog mouths, but only a small number of these germs can make you sick.

**Rabies** is one of the most serious diseases people can get from dog bites. Getting rabies from a dog in the United States is very rare. Rabies is a virus that affects the brain and can be fatal. The most common way rabies is spread is through the bite of an infected animal. The disease can be prevented by vaccinating dogs. In addition, people who are bitten by an animal with rabies should receive treatment immediately to prevent rabies.

**Health care providers in Boston are required to report all animal bites to BPHC. BPHC works with health care providers and Boston Animal Control to ensure that all necessary treatment and follow-up are done.**



Just like people, **dogs are very good at communicating**, but it takes practice for people to understand what a dog's face and body are saying. Most people can recognize the signs of an aggressive dog that does not want to be touched (showing teeth, growling). However, many dog bites occur because people miss the signs that a dog wants to be left alone, even if the dog doesn't seem to be angry or upset. Some signs of a fearful or stressed dog that are easy to miss include:

- Head down, held low, or turned away.
- Tail low, tucked between legs, or wagging weakly.
- Mouth closed.
- Ears held back or held low.
- Hair raised on the back, especially near the tail.
- Being stiff or tense all over, freezing or trembling.
- “Whale-eyed,” showing the whites of the dog's eye more than usual.
- Repeatedly barking with a short, high-pitched yaps or yelps.
- Acting restless.
- Trying to hide in or behind things.
- Quick yawning.
- Excessive drooling.
- Not interested in food.
- Shallow or rapid breathing.
- Nervous behavior, like licking their lips or scratching like they have an itch.

To learn more about dog bite prevention, visit our [website](#).

## Dog Bite Prevention



Boston Public Health Commission  
Infectious Disease Bureau  
1010 Massachusetts Avenue  
Boston, MA 02118  
[www.bphc.org](http://www.bphc.org)  
617-534-5611

Approximately 4.5 million dog bites occur each year in the United States. Learn how to prevent dog bites and reduce the risk of illness and injury!

### Who is most at risk for dog bites?

Children. The rate of dog-bite-related injuries is highest in children 5 to 9 years old. Children are more likely than adults to receive medical attention for dog bites. Senior citizens are the second most common dog bite victims.



### Where do dog bites happen?

Over half of dog-bite injuries occur at home with dogs that are familiar. Among children and adults, having a dog in the household is associated with a higher likelihood of being bitten. As the number of dogs in the home increases, so does the chance of being bitten.

## Preventing Dog Bites: Basic safety tips



### Do:

- Remain motionless ("be still like a tree") when approached by an unfamiliar dog. Stay still and be calm.
- Avoid direct eye contact with unfamiliar dogs.
- Wait for the dog to pass
- If a dog knocks you over, curl into a ball with your head tucked and your hands over your ears and neck
- Immediately let an adult know about stray dogs or dogs that are behaving strangely.

### Don't:

- Approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Run from a dog.
- Panic or make loud noises.
- Disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- Pet a dog before asking its owner if it is okay.
- Pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
- Encourage your dog to play aggressively.
- Let small children play with a dog unsupervised.



## What if you get bitten or attacked by a dog?

- If possible, put your purse, bag, or jacket between you and the dog to protect yourself.
- If you are knocked down, curl into a ball with your head tucked in and your hands over your ears and neck.
- When you get to a safe place, immediately wash any wounds with soap and water.
- Seek medical attention; you may need antibiotics or other treatment.
- Be sure to seek medical care right away if:
  - The wound is serious (uncontrolled bleeding, weakness, severe pain, muscle or bone exposure).
  - The wound becomes red, painful, warm, or swollen, or you develop a fever.
- Although the risk is small, dogs can carry rabies. If you are bitten, contact your health care provider, Boston Animal Control at 617-635-5348 or the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) at 617-534-5611.
- When the incident is reported to BPHC or Boston Animal Control, they will try to contact the owner and ensure the animal has a current rabies vaccination. This is important because the person who was bitten may need rabies preventive treatment.