



INJURY BULLETIN

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DOG BITES

Bites and stings are a very common cause of childhood injury. Of this group, almost half the children (45%) are victims of dog bite.

A successful human-animal bond does not usually come about automatically. Children are often bitten by a dog because they either misunderstand or ignore recognisable cues. Similarly the dog may misread the child's behaviour.

Injuries:

By far the most commonly affected body part is the head:

Bites to the face, cheek, forehead or scalp	26%
Bites to the mouth e.g. jaw, lip	8%
Bites to the ears	5%
Bites to the eyes	2%
Bites to the nose	1%

TOTAL 42%

29% of these injuries required admission to hospital.

Other common injury sites are:

Lower leg	16%
Upper leg	8%
Finger	6%

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* QISU data is based on emergency department presentations to the following hospitals: Mater Children's Hospital, Mater Adult Hospital, Mater Private Emergency Care Centre, Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Hospital, Redland Hospital, Logan Hospital, Royal Children's Hospital, Mt Isa Hospital and Mackay and district hospitals.

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Locations:

Dog bites occur most frequently (in two thirds of cases) in a residential setting: Attacks in the victims own home account for 40% of cases and attacks in another home (quite often a neighbour's yard) account for another 26% of cases.

A quarter of all cases occur on the footpath or road.

Solutions:

Choosing the Dog - In selecting a particular breed. of dog, people often have mixed motives and want a dog to be both a family pet and a guard dog. However certain breeds, such as the Rottweiler and Dobermann are primarily guard dogs. They have been bred for aggression and need dominance. These breeds are therefore not an ideal choice of pet for a young child.

The following comment made by Dr. Judith Blackshaw, senior lecturer at Queensland University's veterinary school is well worth noting: "The bigger the animal, the bigger the wound they are capable of inflicting."

Teach your Child - The description of the circumstances surrounding cases of dog bite reveal that in many instances the child has unconsciously provoked the attack. For example:

Bitten when:

"lifting up the dog's dish"

"looking at pups"

"pulled dog's tail"

"sat on dog's back"

Dogs tend to act in an instinctively self-protective way in certain situations such as being startled from sleep or rest or backed into a corner. However, it is possible to teach children how to respect their pet and avoid behaving in a way that the animal may see as a threat.

Each child-dog combination is unique. The best way for a child to avoid dog bite is to be aware of the characteristics of dogs in general, to be taught about the specific characteristics of his/her own dog's breed and to know his/her own dog in an individual way. Dogs may react unpredictably if they are sick or in pain, afraid, over-excited, bored or in changed circumstances.

Train the Dog - Other injury descriptions tell us that "the dog got excited" or "the dog was angry at the children's playfulness". Dr. Blackshaw points out that anything running is a natural prey to a dog and that like children, dogs can get over-excited. Dog obedience schools are an excellent way of providing training before any aggressive tendencies have a chance to develop.

Know your Rights - Unprovoked attacks can be reported to Council.