

Last week was National Dog Bite Awareness Week and this topic is sadly important enough to share even a week after. The Alabama Veterinary Medical Association is encouraging all dog owners to be aware of the risks involved with dog bites and to learn about ways they can protect themselves and their families from dog bite incidents. "Dog bites often happen during everyday activities among children and seniors," says ALVMA President Hal Pate, D.V.M. "Certain situations can be more conducive to the risk of a dog bite. Protect your family and yourself by being familiar with preventive measures that will minimize the risk."

Every year, more than 4.5 million Americans are bitten by dogs, with more than half of all victims younger than age 14. Each year over 6,000 dog bites are reported in Alabama and many require emergency room visits with some needing hospitalization. Most dog bites affecting young children occur during everyday activities and while interacting with familiar dogs. According to a study completed by State Farm and the Insurance Information Institute, dog bites accounted for more than one-third of all homeowners' insurance liability claim dollars paid out in 2015, costing more than \$570 million. This same year, more than 28,000 people underwent reconstructive surgery as a result of being bitten by dogs.

Dog owners should review these helpful tips below and always be aware of their surroundings when they are with their dogs. Taking precautions to ensure safety for all involved is the best way to reduce the risk for dog bite accidents.

#### **DOG BITE EMERGENCIES**

- If you are bitten, here is a checklist of things you should do:
- If the dog's owner is present, request proof of rabies vaccination, and get the owner's name and contact information.
- Clean the bite wound with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Consult your doctor immediately or go to the emergency room if it's after office hours.
- Contact the dog's veterinarian to check vaccination records.

#### **HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOUR FAMILY**

- Be cautious around strange dogs, and treat your dog with respect.
- Because children are the most common victims of dog bites, parents and caregivers should:
- NEVER leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Be alert for potentially dangerous situations.
- Teach children - including toddlers - to be careful around pets.
- Children must learn not to approach strange dogs or try to pet dogs through fences.
- Teach children to ask permission from the dog's owner before petting the dog.

#### **WHAT'S A DOG OWNER TO DO?**

- Carefully select your pet. Puppies should not be obtained on impulse.
- Make sure your pet is socialized as a young puppy so it feels at ease around people and other animals.
- Don't put your dog in a position where it feels threatened or teased.
- Be calm. Always talk in a quiet voice or whisper -- no shouting -- and take a "time out" if you feel angry or frustrated.
- Train your dog. Basic commands help dogs understand what is expected of them and help build a bond of trust between pets and people.
- Walk and exercise your dog regularly to keep it healthy and provide mental stimulation.
- Avoid highly excitable games like wrestling or tug of war.

- Use a leash in public to ensure you are able to control your dog.
- Keep your dog healthy.
- Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and other preventable infectious diseases.
- Parasite control and other health care are important because how your dog feels affects how it behaves.
- If you have a fenced yard, make sure your gates are secure.
- Neuter your pet. According to the National Canine Research Foundation, approximately 92 percent of fatal dog attacks involved male dogs, 94 percent of which were not neutered.