

While we think pets add immensely to our lives they are capable of inflicting harm quickly if provoked or threatened. In preparation for National Dog Bite Prevention Week May 18-24 we are sharing information provided by the Alabama Veterinary Medical Association's Public Health Committee.

Approximately 7,000 Alabamians (4.7 million annually in the U.S.) were bitten by dogs in 2012. More than half of dog bite victims are under the age 14 and occur during everyday activities and while interacting with familiar dogs. Senior citizens account for the second most common dog bite group.

According to the Insurance Information Institute, insurance companies paid \$317.2 million for dog bite liability claims in 2005 alone and the average cost of a dog bite related hospital stay was \$18,200 in 2008 according to a 2010 Statistical Brief from the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality.

While we hope you never have to deal with a dog bite, if you are bitten you should:

Request proof of rabies vaccination if the dog's owner is present 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.

Prevention is always the best medicine, so here are methods to help prevent dog bites:

Be cautious around strange dogs and treat dogs with respect.

NEVER leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.

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.

Make sure your pet is socialized as a young puppy so it feels at ease around people, children and other animals.

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 with your dog.

Use a leash in public to ensure you are able to control your dog.

If you have a fenced yard, make sure your gates are secure.

Build a fence for your dog - chaining dogs increases their stress, protectiveness and vulnerability.

Have your dog vaccinated against rabies and other preventable infectious diseases.

Carefully select your pet from a reputable source and not on impulse.

Don't put your dog in a position where it feels threatened or teased.

Spay or Neuter your pet.

For more information just search for 'Dog Bite Prevention' on any of the following websites: www.avma.org; www.cdc.gov; www.aap.org; www.adph.state.al.us; www.americanhumane.org.

This coming weekend is Memorial Day weekend and we hope everyone has a friend and family filled holiday. Please see to your pet's safety if they are with you or if you have someone watching them while you are away. The shelter will be closed, Monday, 26 May in observation of Memorial Day. If you return from holiday to find your pet is lost, please call us on Tuesday, 27 May so we can take your information and keep an eye out. Our phone number is 334-567-3377, our email is hselco@bellsouth.net and you can also post lost or found pet information on our shelter Facebook (Humane Society of Elmore County) or another Facebook page entitled Lost & Found Pets in Elmore County.