

# Ask CDC

## So Your Child Wants a Dog...

*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

Welcome to *Ask CDC*, the weekly podcast that answers *your* questions. I'm your host, Susan Laird.

Our question this week is from a mom whose child is begging to get a dog. She's concerned that having a dog is unsafe because she's heard so much in the news about dog bites.

Each year, 800,000 Americans seek medical attention for dog bites – half of these are children. Of those injured, 386,000 require treatment in an emergency department and about 16 die. The rate of dog bite-related injuries is highest for children ages 5 to 9 years, and the rate decreases as children get older.

CDC is committed to helping children grow up safe and healthy. Dog bites are a largely preventable public health problem and adults and children *can* reduce their chances of being bitten.

Here are some things to consider before you get a dog:

- Consult with a professional – a veterinarian, animal behaviorist, or a responsible breeder – to learn about suitable breeds of dogs for your household and lifestyle.
- Realize that dogs require training, socialization, discipline, and healthcare to be good family members. Plan for these *before* committing to get a dog.
- Dogs with a history of aggression are inappropriate in households with children.
- Be sensitive to cues that a child is fearful or apprehensive about a dog and, if so, delay getting a dog.
- Spend time with a dog before buying it or adopting it. Use caution when bringing a dog into the home of an infant or toddler.
- Any dog of any breed has the potential to bite.

Here are some steps you can take to prevent dog bites:

- Spay or neuter all dogs, as this frequently reduces aggressive tendencies.
- Never leave infants or young children alone with any dog.
- Don't play aggressive games with your dog, like wrestling or tug of war.
- Properly socialize and train any dog entering the household. Teach the dog submissive behaviors, like rolling over to expose their abdomen and giving up food without growling.
- Immediately seek professional advice if the dog develops aggressive or undesirable behaviors.

Be sure to teach children basic safety around dogs and review these lessons with them regularly:

- Don't approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Don't scream around or run from a dog.
- Remain motionless – be still like a tree – when approached by a strange dog.
- If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still protecting your head and neck with your arms – be still like a log.
- Don't play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behavior to an adult.
- Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
- Don't disturb a dog who is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- Don't pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
- If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.

Dogs *can* make wonderful pets, but be sure to follow these rules for your child's safety *and* your own.

For more information, visit our website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and search for “dog bites” or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.

Thanks for listening. To submit *your* question to *Ask CDC*, email us at [askcdc@cdc.gov](mailto:askcdc@cdc.gov).

*[Announcer]* For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.