

Dog Bites to the Face



Studies have shown that dog-bite injuries most commonly affect children, who are typically bitten in the face. This study sought to determine human behavior prior to a dog bite to the face and collect demographic data associated with the incidents. It was found that, of the 132 dog-bite incidents to the face analyzed, humans bending over a dog (76%), putting a face close to a dog's face (19%), and gazing between a dog and human (5%) were activities that occurred prior to the incident. None of the victims stepped on, pulled the hair of, punished, or scolded the dog or trimmed its nails before the incident. Seventy percent of victims were children; 84% of these were <12 years old. Adult dogs were responsible for all bites to the face.

Male dogs and large dogs were over-represented. In 48% of cases, bites were from large dogs. Being in the dog's home, yard, or garden were also major associated factors, as was the dog being off-leash. People bitten by a large dog were more likely to seek treatment compared to those bitten by a small dog. Parents (43%) and dog owners (62%) were present when children were bitten. The authors observed that adult presence does not imply adequate supervision; adults may be unaware of or may underestimate the risks for bites. They conclude that known risk factors for dog bites to the face should be avoided and children should be constantly and carefully supervised around dogs.

Global Commentary

If there is one take-home message in this article, it is this: the presence of a child's parent or dog's owner is not sufficient to prevent bites. This is crucial. With our French association (Zoopsy), this is a point we try to teach to owners and parents. The classical message "never leave

a child alone with a dog" is not the right one. The focus should be on assessing the risk for each dog in each family because so many accidents occur even when parents or a dog's owner is present.

This study underlines a link between the size of the dog and severity of wounds on the face. This seems intuitive, but we should not forget that, according to the SCHIRPT study¹ and a paper currently in press in the *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* relating a French survey, size was *not* a relevant factor of severity. Safety messages should address every size of dog.

—Claude Beata, DVM, Dip ECVBM-CA

Reference

1. *Système Canadien Hospitalier d'Information et de Recherche en Prévention des Traumatismes (SCHIRPT) website. Rapport de blessures associées aux morsures et aux attaques de chien.* <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/injury-bles/chirpp/injrep-rapbles/dogbit-fra.php>. Accessed April 2016.

Source

Rezac P, Rezac K, Slama P. Human behavior preceding dog bites to the face. *Vet J.* 2015;206(3):284-288.

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