



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Animal and Human Bites

Topic Overview

Animal and human bites may cause puncture wounds, cuts, scrapes, or crushing injuries. Most animal and human bites cause minor injuries, and home treatment is usually all that is needed to care for the wound.

Animal bites

Most animal bites occur in school-age children. The face, hands, arms, and legs are the most common sites for animal bites. Since most bites occur in children, it is important to teach children to be careful around animals and that an animal could hurt them. Young children should always be supervised around animals.

Dog bites occur more than any other animal bite and are most frequent in the summer months. The dog is usually known to the person, and most injuries result from the dog being teased or bothered while eating or sleeping. Boys are bitten about twice as often as girls. The arms, head, and neck are the most likely areas to be bitten in children.

Cat bites usually cause deeper puncture wounds than dog bites and have a high risk for bacterial infection because they can be difficult to clean adequately.

Exotic pet bites, such as from rats, mice, or gerbils, may carry illnesses, but [rabies](#) is not usually a concern. The bites from some pets, such as iguanas, are at risk for infection but do not carry other serious risks.

Livestock, such as horses, cows, and sheep, have powerful jaws and can cause crushing bite injuries. Infection, [tetanus](#), and rabies are possible risks.

Wild animal bites may occur while hunting, camping, or hiking. Infection, tetanus, and rabies are possible risks.

Human bites

Adult bites that cause a wound to the hand can be serious. A clenched fist striking another person in the mouth and teeth can cut or puncture the skin over the knuckles. This is commonly called a "fight bite." Underlying tissues may be damaged, and an infection can develop.

Bites from children are:

- Usually not very deep.
- Not as forceful as adult bites.

- Not too likely to become infected.
- Not damaging to underlying tissue.

When you have a bite:

- Stop the bleeding. See [how to stop bleeding](#) .
- Determine whether other tissues, such as blood vessels, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, bones, or internal organs, have been injured.
- Determine whether evaluation and treatment by a doctor are needed.
- Clean the wound to prevent bacterial infections, [tetanus](#) ("lockjaw"), and viral infections, such as [herpes simplex](#) virus, and [cytomegalovirus](#) (CMV).
- Determine the risk for [rabies](#) and the need for treatment to prevent the disease.
- Determine whether you need a [tetanus shot](#).

Review the Emergencies and Check Your Symptoms sections to determine if and when you need to see a doctor.

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