

Dog Encounter Safety

Since it's estimated that nearly half of U.S. households hold at least one dog, dogs pose a potential danger for those who work outdoors or must visit homes in the course of their work. That duty often falls to first responders, social workers and home health aides. As a result, it's important for those workers to learn how to interact with strange dogs and pick up on warning signs to identify a potentially aggressive dog.



The US Postal Service, whose carriers rank third behind children and the elderly as victims of dog attacks, advises its carriers to:

- Never assume a dog will not bite.
- Never run and don't make any sudden movements. Stand your ground and face the dog. Whether to look an aggressive dog in the eye is debated, but stand your ground, face the dog and back away slowly.
- Be vigilant. Never wear headphones or participate in any distracting activity (such as taking a phone call or texting) when approaching a strange dog or a dwelling.
- If possible, place a barrier between yourself and the dog. Possible barriers include a bag, walking stick, umbrella, clipboard, newspaper, or other bite-able object. If the dog bites it, don't drop it. Instead use it to guide the dog.
- Stay upright and keep your head and neck away from the dog.
- Carrying a repellent is recommended. Repellents approved by the American Veterinary Association are made from cayenne pepper and mineral oil. If needed, a repellent should be sprayed directly at the dog's eyes and muzzle. Keep in mind, however, that using a repellent is a last resort. An estimated 40% of dogs would not be deterred by a repellent.
- Be aware that any physical interaction between you and the dog's owner may be perceived as a threat by the dog.

For additional information, including assistance in implementing any of these guidelines, please contact your regional Risk Control Specialist or the NCACC Risk Management Pools. We will be glad to assist you.

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Risk Control Best Practices

Dog Encounter Safety (continued)

- Be especially cautious around any dog that is running loose outside. If possible, delay your visit until after you can verify the dog has been restrained.



Although the above advice includes to never assume a dog will not bite, there are warning signs that can alert you to a dog being aggressive or afraid, including:

- Stiff legs and raised tails may indicate tension or anxiety. If a dog is standing at stiff attention with its tail up, proceed with caution.
- A tail held close to its body or tucked between its legs may indicate fear, and actions of a fearful dog are unpredictable.
- A pulled back head or ears indicate tension or anxiety, as do a wrinkled brow or a flicking tongue.
- If there are multiple dogs or a large dog (more than 100 lbs.), proceed with caution.

The US Postal Service also offers several ways you may be able to defuse the situation:

- Be patient. From a distance, allow the dog to sniff you.
- If a dog is unaware of your presence (such as if the dog is sleeping or otherwise occupied), make a soft, non-startling noise to let it know you're there.
- If possible, if a dog is running loose, contact the owner and insist that the dog be restrained before you enter the dwelling.

If you have been bitten, you should:

- Clean the wound with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Visit a doctor or emergency room as soon as possible.
- Request proof of a rabies vaccination.
- Get the owner's name and contact information.

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