



What To Do If Your Dog Is Bitten By Another Dog

Question 1. Dog Bites

There are several basic principles to follow when dealing with dog bite wounds. Pet owners can start using these when faced with a dog bite wound before seeing their vet, in order to minimise infection and other complications that can follow a dog bite.

The first and most important principle to follow if your pet has been bitten by another dog (and this applies to any time your pet is injured or in pain) is to avoid being bitten yourself while tending to the wound.

Even the most placid and good natured dogs may bite their owner when they are in pain or shock after being attacked by another dog.

A soft cloth muzzle can be used to ensure the pet owner is not bitten. A tea towel or T shirt is tied firmly around the muzzle whilst the wound is being treated.

The next important thing to do is try and determine the severity of the wound. Deep lacerations can bleed heavily resulting in severe shock and possible death. [Lisa if you think the bit about death is a bit too heavy/gloomy feel free to delete]. If blood is flowing freely from the wound, controlling the bleeding should take precedence over any other aspects of wound management. A clean towel or item of clothing should be placed over the wound and firm direct pressure applied until the pet is taken to the vet. If the wound is on a limb try and keep it elevated.

If the wound is gaping open and bleeding is not heavy, the next first aid principle to follow is to protect the wound from further infection and get the wound

as clean as possible. Pet owners should avoid the temptation of putting their finger in the wound to see how deep it is. Whilst dog bites are already dirty contaminated wounds, bacteria that normally live on our skin can make the infection worse.

If there is a lot of hair around the wound this should be clipped away so that there is no hair in the wound. Some KY gel from a new tube can be squirted into the wound while the hair is being clipped to stop more hair entering the wound.

The wound should then be thoroughly flushed to try and remove foreign debris. The best way to achieve this is by squirting sterile saline into the wound with a syringe. Large volumes can be used safely – at least 250ml or a cup as a guide. If sterile saline is unavailable then tap water is better than nothing. You should avoid using products like Dettol and hydrogen peroxide as they damage tissue and will delay wound healing.

If possible, the wound should be covered until veterinary assistance can be sought. This will help prevent further contamination and injury through self trauma.

I think it is a great idea for all pet owners to have a basic first aid kit at home. It is worth asking your local vet for advice on what to have in it. Alternatively they may make one up for you. Having things like syringes, sterile saline and dressing materials handy can be very helpful when it comes to dealing with wounds. Good wound management in the first one hour post injury can make a big difference to the

outcome. It is important to remember that dog bites are always contaminated and will be infected, so antibiotics will almost always be required. This will mean seeing your vet as soon as possible after the injury has occurred.

Question 2. Snake Bites

If your dog is bitten by a snake it is important to try and remain calm. It will be necessary to act quickly and decisively. It is very helpful if the snake can be identified. If the dog has killed the snake in the process of being bitten the snake should be brought to the vet for identification. Do not under any circumstances attempt to catch or kill the snake as you will run the risk of being bitten.

The part of the dog that has been bitten should be immobilised and kept below the level of the heart. The bite site should be cleaned with soap and water.

When the bite is on a limb a splint should be applied. A firm dressing is placed at least 5cm above and below the bite. If bandaging material is unavailable a handkerchief or shredded clothing can be used.

There are many misconceptions about managing snake bites. The following guidelines should always be adhered to.

- Do not cut the bite
- Do not apply a tourniquet
- NEVER try to suck out the venom by mouth.
- Do not apply cold and/or ice packs. Recent studies indicate that application of cold or ice makes the injury much worse.

Most importantly, seek veterinary attention as soon as possible – administration of the appropriate antivenom will give the best chance of surviving snake bite.

Short Bio

Adam Gordon graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. He completed a Masters degree in Veterinary Studies at Murdoch University in 2002. Adam has been in companion animal practice since 1990 and is principal of Maroubra Veterinary Hospital.