PREVENTION OF DOG BITES IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Description
Dog bites are serious and largely preventable injuries that disproportionately affect young children. The vast majority of dog bites to children are inflicted by a family pet or familiar dog and these injuries most often occur at home (Arhant, Landenberger, Beetz, & Troxler, 2016; Garvey, Twitchell, Ragar, Egan, & Jamshidi, 2015; Reisner & Shofer, 2008). The absence of appropriate adult supervision is a significant, but modifiable risk factor for dog bite injuries to young children. Despite the magnitude of this problem and research defining the dangers, successful programs targeting the reduction of dog bite injuries to infants and small children have not been developed (Warner & Schilling, 2017).

APSNA Position

It is the position of APSNA that:

1. Childhood dog bite injuries can be prevented when parents and dog owners understand safe child-dog interactions and parents consistently provide appropriate supervision of these interactions.
2. Pediatric providers should include anticipatory guidance at well child visits to raise awareness about the risk of injury and educate parents about appropriate supervision of child-dog interactions (Warner & Schilling, 2017).
3. Anticipatory guidance to parents should include ways to improve the safety of the child’s environment such as the use of baby gates to ensure separation of the child and dog (Warner & Schilling, 2017).
4. Parents should be taught that a sleeping infant or child should never be left unsupervised in a room with a dog and children should not be allowed to put their faces in close proximity to a dog’s face (Arhant et al., 2016; Iazzetti, 1998; Rezac, Rezac, & Slama, 2015).
5. An adult caretaker should supervise all toddler-dog interactions and the child should not be allowed to approach a dog while it is eating or sleeping (Patronek, Sacks, Delise, Cleary, & Marder, 2013; Reisner & Schofer, 2008).
6. Collaboration between medical and veterinary professionals in a variety of settings will be necessary for the development of successful dog bite prevention programs.
7. The development of state based, centralized reporting systems for dog bites would aid in determining the true incidence of these injuries and help identify areas for further research and prevention.
8. Future research should examine the impact of educational programs on the rate of pediatric dog bite injuries.

Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were more than 87,000 nonfatal dog bites to children ten years of age and younger in 2014. This is a rate of 86 dog bite injuries per 100,000 children (CDC, 2003). Children under the age of five years old are at highest
risk for severe and fatal injuries resulting from dog bites (Daniels, Ritzi, & O’Neil, 2009; Patronek et al., 2013) and are two to three times more likely than an adult to suffer a dog bite injury. A review of 256 dog bite fatalities in the US between 2000 and 2009 identified the most preventable incidents occurred when a young child was left alone with a dog or came into contact with a dog while unsupervised (Patronek et al., 2013). Infants and toddlers suffer the highest proportion of dog bites to the face and neck which can result in severe, disfiguring injuries requiring multiple surgical procedures and long hospital stays (Rezac, Rezac, & Slama, 2015). The physical and emotional impacts of dog bite injuries can be long-term. Child victims may develop symptoms including intense fear of dogs, reluctance to leave home, and lack of interest in routine play activities (Peters, Sottiauk, Appleboom, & Kahn, 2004). Parents and dog owners are often unaware or underestimate the risks inherent to toddler-dog interactions (Arhant et al., 2016).

Pit bulls are the breed most often responsible for life-threatening dog bite injuries to children including ocular injuries (Prendes, Jian-Amandi, Chang, & Shaftel, 2016), and severe injuries to the head and neck (O’Brien, Andre, Robinson, Squires & Tollefson, 2015). Most states lack a centralized reporting system for dog bite injuries (Rhea et al., 2014) and dog bite laws are the purview of individual state and local authorities.

This position statement was developed to educate health care providers about age-specific risk factors and prevention strategies for dog bite injuries in children. APSNA strongly encourages all health care providers, teachers, legislators, public safety advocates, and government officials to protect our children from dog bite injuries with the overall goal to reduce the frequency of dog bites as well as to protect our greatest resource, our children.

References


**Resources**

Dog Bite Prevention Tips
American Academy of Pediatrics

Dog Bite Prevention
American Veterinary Medical Association
[https://www.avma.org/public/Pages/Dog-Bite-Prevention.aspx](https://www.avma.org/public/Pages/Dog-Bite-Prevention.aspx)

Family Paws Parent Education
[www.familypaws.com](http://www.familypaws.com)

The Safe Kids/Safe Dogs Project
[https://www.safekidssafedogs.com](https://www.safekidssafedogs.com)

Doggone Safe

Holly Warner, and Lynne Farber, Trauma SIG
February, 2018