

fact sheet

The Facts*

Each year in Queensland, an average of 1200 children present at hospital emergency departments as a result of a dog attacks. Eighteen per cent of these require admission.

Who is Attacked?

- Children under 5 are most at risk with 12 – 18 months the peak period
- Of those attacked, 78% are family or friends of the dog owners.
- Boys are more likely to be attacked.

Where do Attacks Occur?

- 81% of attacks occur in the person's own home.
- Other attacks frequently occur at friend's / relative's residences where the child is known to the dog.
- Adults, not children are more likely to be attacked in a public place.

Type of Injuries

- Most serious injuries are to the child's head and face, often leaving them scarred.
- Eye damage may occur.
- Other injuries include lacerations and bruising to the arms and legs.

What Dogs are Involved?

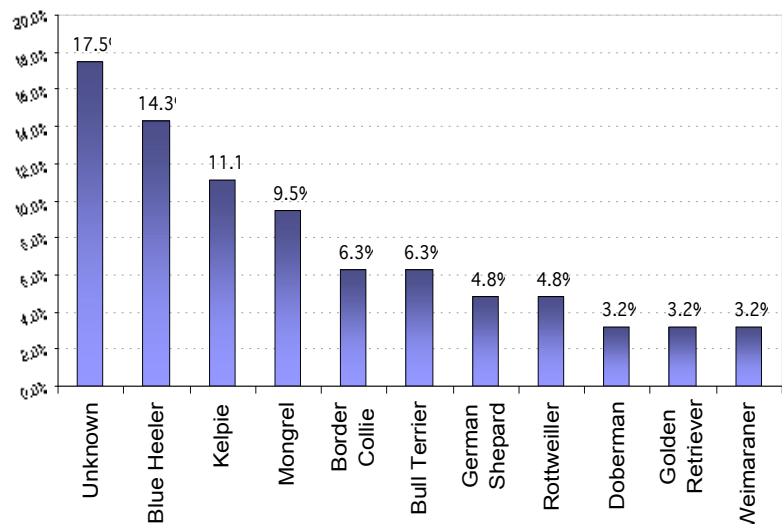
Any sort of dog can pose a risk to children and babies. A study conducted by fifth year medical students at the University of Western Australia** in 1999, looked at dog attack presentations to Princess Margaret Hospital for Children's Emergency Department between July 1998 and August 1999. Their study identified 21 different breeds of dog involved in attacks on children. The graph below shows the relative frequency of dog bites by breed of dog.

The number of vicious dog attacks on children has prompted Federal and State Governments to consider controlling the importation of some breeds of dogs and to introduce new dog control laws.

Dog bites tend to occur more frequently when children are interacting directly with the dog – eg: patting, playing, feeding.

Parents and carers who are aware of the hazards posed by dogs can take precautions to reduce the risk of dog attacks at home.

Relative frequency of dog attacks by breed



** Willson A, Prosser S, Nedeljkovic Z, Wright S. A Retrospective Study of Dog Attacks in West Australian Children. 2000

Safety Tips

These are some tips to reduce the chances of a child in your care being bitten or injured by a dog:

- Always ask permission from the owner before slowly approaching an unfamiliar dog.
- Curl your fingers and allow the dog to sniff the back of your hand
- Stroke the dog gently on the chest, shoulder or under the chin
- Avoid approaching dogs that are sleeping or eating
- Stand still like a fence post if approached by a strange dog and don't squeal or jump
- Avoid eye contact with the dog by looking at your own feet
- Don't disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies

Simple Steps Prevent Dog Attacks

Separation

- Keep babies and young children away from your dog.
- Supervise dogs with children at all times. This is particularly important when a new infant comes into a family of long-time dog owners.
- Ask friends and relatives to keep their dogs separate from your children unless well supervised.
- **Parents should not consider buying a breed listed as dangerous.**



Obedience

Obedience training is one of the best things that you can do for your dog. The rewards are in turning your dog from an uncontrollable animal into a well-mannered dog. Some owners enjoy training their dogs and go on into competitions and gain obedience titles for their dog.

Training

The RSPCA recommends that all dogs:

- Be taught immediately to obey commands
- Answer to “come”, “sit” and “stay” from all family members
- Attend obedience school
- That are taught or actively encouraged to be guard dogs, should not be mixed with children.

When to buy a dog

Parents are advised to wait till their children reach school age before purchasing a dog.

When buying a dog, the RSPCA recommends matching your needs to the dog.

Real Life Cases

- A 3 year old girl was hugging her pet greyhound when the dog snapped and bit her on the face. She was admitted to hospital for treatment.
- A 4 year old boy in the carport of his aunt’s house tried to take a bone off his aunt’s pet corgi. The dog had never bitten before and knew the child. The child received bites to left side of face and forehead and was admitted to hospital for surgery.
- A 2 year old girl at home was feeding her pet labrador biscuits and he turned and snapped. She received bites across her face, and through cheek also causing eye damage. She was admitted for treatment.

For more information on incidence of dog bites and prevention strategies visit www.safecommunitiesqld.org and look under the program heading for “Animal Related Injuries”.

For information and advice on selecting a pet for your family speak to your local vet or visit the Petcare Information and Advisory Service on www.petnet.com.au.

To view the RCH Melbourne brochure

“Dogs and Kids” click on

www.rch.org.au/safetycentre and type “dog” in the search field.

*Data provided by QISU 2006

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