



Coalition for
Living Safely
with Dogs

www.livingsafelywithdogs.org

Dog Bites in Colorado – Key Findings and Recommended Action Steps

About the project:

Dog bite data was collected in Colorado to assist in making informed decisions about dangerous dog legislation, focus community resources and education efforts, and support animal care and control programs. This report is the most rigorous study of its type and the first comprehensive collection and analysis through Animal Control. The Coalition for Living Safely with Dogs (CLSD) partnered with the Colorado Association of Animal Control Officers (CAACO) for data collection and contracted with Corona Research, Inc. to analyze the bite data and to create a report on the findings. The project was funded by Animal Assistance Foundation. The initial survey ran from July 2007-July 2008 with 17 participating agencies. Survey respondents serve over half the human and dog populations in Colorado.

Most dogs do not bite. Less than one-third of one percent of dogs in the reporting area were reported to animal control for biting a human.

Action step: Proper education about appropriate human-dog interactions and typical dog behavior is the most effective way to help you and your family live safely with dogs. Socialization, obedience training and supervision of family dogs combined with owner education can go a long way in preventing bite incidences. Additionally, it is important to report aggressive dogs, tethered or chained dogs, loose dogs in public areas, and any dog bites that you or your family experiences.

Many different types of dogs were involved in reported dog bite incidents. Bites from 129 different breeds of dog were reported to the 17 participating animal control organizations during the one year period of study.

Action step: All dogs have the ability to bite so use caution when approaching any dog, especially those you don't know. When selecting a dog, choose one that is appropriate for your lifestyle and the environment in which you live. Your dog should also be well socialized with people and other dogs. The ultimate goal of socialization is to be able to take your dog any place, into any situation, and have him/her stay calm, relaxed, and confident.

The severity of most bites is moderate. Of those reported, 62 percent of bites inflicted were level 2 to level 3 injuries (one puncture to multiple punctures).

Action step: Even a moderate bite can impact your life, particularly for children, so take steps to prevent and treat all bites. Potential impacts on your life can include medical attention for family members, medical bills for non family members, contact with law enforcement, and higher insurance premiums.

Any dog can bite given certain circumstances.

▪ **Running at large was the single most common bite circumstance.**

Action step: To prevent running at large incidences, supervise and safely house your dog and always have your dog leashed in public places. Be aware of your surroundings particularly in public parks where you may encounter dogs running at large or children who approach your pet unexpectedly.

- **Many bites were not a result of aggression towards humans, but occurred when a human intervened in fighting or play between dogs.**

Action step: To reduce bites from dog-to-dog aggression, owners should restrain and socialize their dogs, as well as educate themselves about normal canine play and how to safely intervene if a fight occurs.

- **Approximately half of all bites occurred at home, usually when a dog was protecting property, food, or toys.**

Action step: Dogs can be instinctually protective of property, food, or toys, which can result in aggressive behavior. Be aware of these behaviors expressed by your own dog. Make visitors aware of your dog's temperament and never leave any dog unsupervised with children.

Whether any breed is more or less likely to bite than any other breed depends on knowing the number of each breed living in Colorado. There are more bites from some breeds than others in the dataset. To draw conclusions about breeds, we need to know whether bites are proportional or disproportional to a breed's population. At this time, there is no dog census for Colorado.

Action step: Don't judge a dog by its "cover," because any dog can bite given certain circumstances.

Male dogs bit twice as often as female dogs and caused more serious injuries. Male dogs were responsible for 60 percent of bites, while females were only responsible for 30 percent of bites (for 10 percent of bites, the dog's sex was unknown). Male dogs were more likely to bite while protecting property, food, or toys; female dogs were more likely to bite during dog-to-dog aggression.

Action step: Take advantage of behavioral resources that are tailored to your dog's age, sex, breed, and history. Education about dog behavior can help you understand circumstances in which your dog may feel threatened or protective.

Adolescent dogs between one and four years of age were responsible for the most bites.

Action step: Adolescent dogs and puppies have special exercise, socialization, and behavioral needs. A responsible pet owner should ensure a safe and healthy outlet for the energy of a young dog.

Children (14 and under) were bitten disproportionately to their population; nine- and ten-year-old boys were the most common victims. Children were bitten twice as often as would be expected given their proportion of the population.

Action step: Always supervise young children and animals when they are interacting. It is important to educate your children about how to be safe around dogs – children who learn to treat dogs with care, consideration, and respect will be safer around dogs. When selecting a dog for your family, consider the dog's unique behavioral attributes and history with children.