

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 16, 2008

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**THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOGNIZES MAY 18-24 AS NATIONAL DOG BITE PREVENTION WEEK**

**TALLAHASSEE** – The Florida Department of Health (DOH) joins the Florida Animal Control Association, the Florida Veterinary Medical Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Humane Society of the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Postal Service to promote May 18-24 as National Dog Bite Prevention Week. Annually more than 4.7 million Americans, approximately half of them children, suffer from dog bite injuries. Many of these injuries are from dogs they know and interact with regularly.

“Public education plays an important role in reducing the risk of dog bites, particularly with children,” said Dr. Carina Blackmore, Florida’s State Public Health Veterinarian. “Responsible dog ownership and dog safety education for children are proven ways to prevent dog bites.”

Every year, more than 500 Florida residents are bitten severely enough to require hospitalization, and two Floridians die due to injuries sustained from dog bites. Injury rates in Florida are highest among children between the ages of one and nine years old, with boys being bitten more often than girls in the same age group. In addition, a higher proportion of children under 10 years of age sustain bites to the head and neck compared to other age groups.

However, dog bites can also result in serious injuries for teenagers and adults. In 2006, three Florida residents 25 years or older died as a result of dog attacks. Studies show that unneutered (intact) male dogs are associated with 70-76% of reported dog bites, emphasizing the importance of neutering pets. The number of dog bite injuries increases during the months of April through September, with the peak occurring in July.

**When you or your child approach a dog, remember to:**

- Wait and watch the dog’s body language.
- Ask the owner for permission to pet the animal.
- Let the pet sniff you.
- Pet the dog in the direction of its fur.

**Safety tips for dog owners:**

- Before getting a dog, ask a veterinarian or animal shelter personnel about which dog is right for your family and your lifestyle.
- Spay or neuter your dog.
- Socialize your dog so that it feels at ease around people and other animals.
- Do not put your dog in situations where it may feel threatened or teased.
- Follow leash laws. Do not let your dog roam freely.
- Train your dog to obey basic commands consistently such as “stay”, “sit” and “come.”
- Keep your dog healthy with regular check-ups and a vaccinations program tailored to your dog’s needs.
- Make sure your veterinarian vaccinates your dog against rabies with a licensed rabies vaccine.
- See a veterinarian promptly if your dog is sick or injured. Illness and pain can make a dog more likely to bite.
- Do not play aggressive games with your dog.



- Confine your dog in a fenced yard or “dog run” when it is outside.
- Do not leave you dog on a chain for long periods of time. Chained dogs are more likely to bite.

**Safety tips for adults and children:**

- Never approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Never run from a dog and never scream around a dog.
- If you believe a dog is about to attack you, try to place something between yourself and the dog, such as a backpack or a bicycle.
- If a dog knocks you over, roll into a ball, cover your face and stay still.
- Children should never approach or play with dogs unless supervised by an adult.
- Children should tell an adult if they see a stray dog or a dog acting strangely.
- Do not look a dog right in the eyes.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.
- Adults should never leave an infant or young child alone with any dog, not even the family pet.

**If bitten:**

- Seek medical attention immediately.
- Control bleeding and wash the area of the bite with soap and water.
- Report the bite to your local county health department, animal control agency or police.

DOH promotes, protects and improves the health of all people in Florida. For more information, visit: [www.MyFloridaEH.com](http://www.MyFloridaEH.com).

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