

# Dog Attacks

In South Australia during 2002:

- 112 children aged 0 – 12 years attended emergency departments as the result of an injury caused by a dog.
- 64 children aged 0 – 12 years were admitted to hospital as the result of a dog attack.

## Who is attacked?

- Children under 12 years of age are most at risk.
- Children aged 1-4 years have the highest rate of injury.
- Of those attacked, the majority are family or friends of the dog owners.

## Where do attacks occur?

- Many attacks occur at home.
- 36% in the victim's house/yard.
- 24% at a friend or neighbour's house/yard.

## Type of Injuries

- Most serious injuries are to the child's head and face, often leaving them scarred.
- Others 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 (UWA)\* 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 place controls on the importation of some breeds of dog and to introduce new dog control laws.

The UWA study showed that 45% of 1-3 year-olds and 27.3% of 4-6 year-olds are bitten in their own home. Another 30% of 1-3 year-olds and 59.1% of 4-6 year-olds are bitten in someone else's home.

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

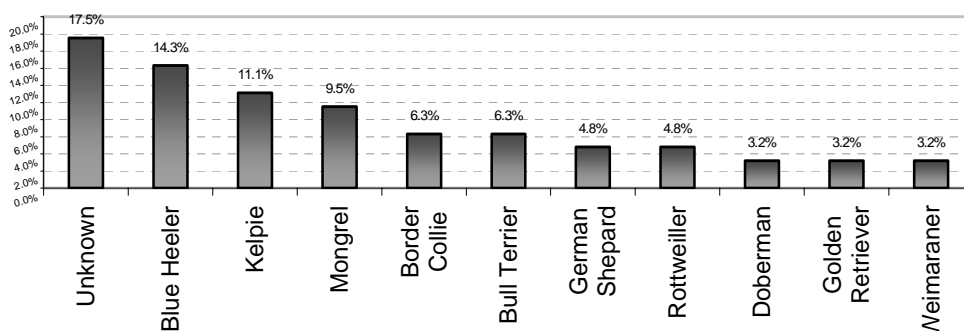
Parents and carers who are aware of the hazards posed by dogs can take precautions to reduce the risk of dog attacks at home.

## Safety Tips

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

- Never approach an unfamiliar dog.
- Never run from a dog and scream.
- Do not look a dog in the eye.
- Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- Do not pat a dog without allowing it to see you and sniff you first.
- Never play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
- Stay still when an unfamiliar dog comes up to you ("Be still like a tree").
- If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still.

Relative frequency of dog attacks



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

## 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 at all times.

### 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 their training and go on into competitions and gain obedience titles for their dog.



### Putting your dog on a leash

By law in South Australia ALL dogs must be on a leash that is less than 2 metres long when it is outside of its property, unless otherwise stated.

Check with your local council and any other areas that you walk your dog about specific regulations for the area.

### 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 Buying a Dog

#### Match your needs to your dog



Parents of small children should not consider buying a breed listed as dangerous.

#### The RSPCA recommends that you:

- Find out about the type of dog you are interested in.
- Consult your local vet on the dog that best suit your needs.

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## Boy Bitten By Savage Dog

A six-year-old boy was attacked and bitten by a large Staffordshire cross dog, while riding a bicycle outside his grandmother’s home in a Perth suburb.

The boy was admitted to hospital after being bitten on the face and head.

The dog is believed to have been roaming around the area before the incident occurred.

### When to buy a dog

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

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#### For more information:

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This project is proudly sponsored by ‘Hotel Care Community Projects’, a program funded by South Australian hotels with gaming machines.



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