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If a Dog Bites You, Do These 7 Things Now

Infection is the biggest danger



You're playing with your dog, and somehow, between growls and tail wags, it can happen. Those canine teeth can bite or scratch. Or alternatively, you could be walking down a street and an unknown mutt can attack without warning.

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Either way, there are steps you need to take right away to treat the wound and reduce the risk of infection. You'll need professional medical attention the same day.

A dog's front teeth will grab and compress your tissue, and their smaller teeth can also tear your skin. The result is an open, jagged wound. If the wound becomes infected, it is often severe, says Emergency medicine physician [Stephen Sayles III, MD](#).

"The No. 1 concern with these bites is infection," he says. "You may need hospitalization and require intravenous antibiotics. You should always see a primary care provider if you're bitten."

No matter what, make sure you see a doctor within eight hours of a dog bite, he says. Waiting longer raises your infection risk. If you have [diabetes](#) or are [immunocompromised](#), your infection risk is even greater.

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7 steps to treating a dog bite

If a dog bites you, take these steps right away:

- 1 **Press on the wound gently** to cause some bleeding to help flush out as much bacteria as possible.
- 2 **Wash the wound** with mild soap and water.
- 3 **Slow the bleeding** with a clean cloth.
- 4 **Apply over-the counter antibiotic cream** if you have it.
- 5 **Wrap the wound** in a sterile bandage. Keep the wound bandaged and see your doctor.
- 6 **Change the bandage several times a day** once your doctor has examined the wound.
- 7 **Watch for signs of infection**, including redness, swelling, increased pain and fever.

What will your doctor do?

Your doctor will want to know more about the dog that bit you and how it happened. He or she will also likely clean the wound again, apply antibiotic ointment and prescribe antibiotics, such as Augmentin, if there's an infection concern.

Your doctor may also give you a booster shot if your [tetanus](#) vaccine is out-of-date.

Depending on the wound, your doctor may also recommend stitches. Generally, though, dog wounds are left open to heal unless they are on the face or if they could leave particularly severe scars if left unsutured.

Bacteria from bites raises infection risk

Roughly 50 percent of dog bites introduce bacteria, including *staphylococcus*, *streptococcus* and *pasteurella*, as well as *capnocytophaga*.

Unvaccinated and feral dogs can also potentially carry – and transfer – [rabies](#), so your doctor will want to know details about the dog that bit you.

Ultimately, Dr. Sayles says, caring for a dog bite is about keeping bacteria from causing an infection.



bites dogs infection

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