

Immediate Management for Safety

The dog in your home has a bite history. They have successfully bitten in any of the following scenarios:

- They have targeted one or more family members in the home.
- They have targeted visitors to the home.
- They have targeted strangers outside the home.

You need to take measures to manage the dog safely while waiting for a behaviour consultation at Toronto Humane Society.

It's very important to accurately read the dog's body language: most dogs give warning signs before biting, but some of these signals can be subtle and quick -- you need to be attuned to them:

- Stiffened body posture
- Whale eye, where you can see the whites of the dog's eyes
- Hard gaze
- Tight closed mouth
- Growling
- Lifted lip
- Bared teeth
- Snapping
- Lunging

Management for safety in the home

If the dog has bitten one or more family members in the home, try to identify the circumstances that provoked the bite: Did it occur while the dog was being handled? While the dog was eating? While they were playing with toys? While they were on the couch and someone tried to move them off? While they were sleeping in their bed and somebody directly approached them?

Depending on the trigger, you can do any or all of the following:

- Always leave a leash on the dog so you can move them quickly away from potentially high-risk situations.
- Minimize handling (avoid touching the collar, petting, rough-housing etc.).
- Do not allow vulnerable family members, such as children, to approach the dog.
- Supervise the dog at all times, do not let them wander freely in the home.
- When you cannot supervise the dog, confine them to a safe space away from vulnerable family members, such as a crate in a room.
- If the bite incidents have occurred due to resource guarding (see THS's information sheet *Resource Guarding*), take care to feed the dog in a separate room away from humans and other animals; only allow toys if the dog will drop them for high-value food (and don't allow toys if children are in the home); keep the dog off highly prized places such as furniture and human beds.
- Leave the dog alone while they are sleeping; gently call to draw them away from their bed, do not approach or touch.
- Depending on the severity of the bite incident (see Dr. Ian Dunbar's Bite Scale <https://apdt.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ian-dunbar-dog-bite-scale.pdf>), you may want the dog to wear a muzzle most of the time (except when eating or sleeping). To help accustom them to the muzzle, put long-lasting, high-value treats inside it, such as peanut butter or Cheez Whiz; the dog will poke their nose in repeatedly to lick the tasty food and build a positive association with the muzzle. With some practice sessions, they'll become conditioned to wearing it (see THS's *Muzzle Training Behaviour Modification Protocol* for more information).



Safe management for visitors to the home

If the dog has shown territorial aggression to unfamiliar people visiting your home, resulting in a bite incident, consider the following measures for safely managing future visits:

- Avoid any confrontation by confining the dog to a crate/another room for the duration of your guest's visit. The crate should not be in the room where you are visiting. If the guests include children, the dog should be confined away from them.
- Or: Start with the dog being confined in their space at the beginning of the visit and bring them out on leash, keeping them at your side and well away from the visitor. Reward them using treats for calm behaviour (sitting, lying down) and relaxed body language (no growling or raised hackles, etc.). Your guest can also toss treats from a distance, making their presence a positive experience for the dog.
- If the dog is not confined to their crate/space for the duration of the visit, but you are uncertain of their tolerance level for an unfamiliar visitor, put a muzzle on them.

Safe management outside the home

If the dog has shown reactivity toward strangers while you're out walking, and successfully bitten in this circumstance, take the following measures to avoid future confrontations:

- If the bite was severe or there has been more than one biting incident, muzzle the dog for all outside excursions.
- Walk the dog at low-traffic times of day, when the streets are least populated. Avoid school yards or playgrounds where children gather.
- If the dog is difficult to manage on leash, lunging at strangers, use extra equipment to safely control them. A front-clip body harness, with the leash attached to both it and the dog's collar, can greatly improve your handling ability. A head halter also offers more control if the dog is lunging at a stranger.
- Know your dog's threshold for aggressive reactivity to strangers -- is it 6 feet, 10 feet, 20 feet? -- and space yourself accordingly, creating more distance, not less.
- Politely but firmly discourage strangers from approaching the dog well before they cross the dog's threshold.
- If a stranger persists in approaching, make an emergency "U-turn" and walk quickly away in the other direction, or cross the street.
- Carry high-value treats at all times to distract the dog and hold their focus if you find yourself in a surprise situation where a stranger is nearing and you're unable to take other avoidance measures.

