

# Opinion: Safety tips to prevent dog bites

By Henry Brzezinski

With warmer weather and increased outdoor activities throughout the county, El Dorado County Animal Services is sharing safety tips with the public to prevent dog bites.

Between 300 and 400 dog bites typically occur in El Dorado County each year; most of these are avoidable.

It is critically important for members of the community to keep their dogs confined to their own property or on a leash when off property. Dogs running loose, particularly those acting aggressively, and all dog bites should be promptly reported to Animal Services. Animal Services strictly enforces county, Placerville and South Lake Tahoe leash laws.

If anyone is concerned about stray dogs or dog bites, they should contact our office. Life threatening animal emergencies should be reported immediately by calling 911 or Animal Services.

We are fortunate to live in a beautiful rural county and dog owners often mistakenly believe it is acceptable to let their dogs run at large or that their dog won't cause a problem. But this creates a danger to the dog and other residents. Furthermore, the owner of the dog can be held financially liable if the dog injures someone. The county also has ordinances related to potentially dangerous and vicious dogs, with both costly civil consequences and/or severe criminal penalties.

Dogs can be unpredictable and even family pets that have never acted aggressively can bite. Children, particularly small children, are common victims and they can be seriously injured

if the dog bites (causing severe injury, muscle tears, disfiguring lacerations and ultimately corrective surgery), so parents need to educate them about proper behavior around dogs.

**To keep everyone safe, Animal Services recommends the following tips:**

- If you have a dog, keep it properly confined on your property.
- When walking your dog, keep it on leash. Do not allow your dog off-leash at any time in public places, including sidewalks, trails, parks, beaches and other locations except for designated off-leash areas.
- Instruct young children to never approach dogs without adult supervision and the adult asking about the dog's behavior.
- Never attempt to touch a dog that is eating or in the possession of a bone or a treat.
- Use caution with dogs with puppies.
- Instruct young children not to scream or run near dogs.
- Do not tease or taunt a dog. Never pull an animal's tail or fur.
- Keep your face away from the dog's face when approaching or playing with them.
- Ask the owner's permission first before approaching and petting a dog.
- When walking, consider calmly crossing the street rather than passing a dog, even when the dog is on-leash with its owner.
- If a dog threatens you, try to remain calm and back away slowly. Avoid eye contact with an aggressive dog.
- If a dog tries to bite you, put a barrier (a board, purse or whatever is available) between you and the dog and back away slowly and call for help.
- Be sure to maintain your dog's current license and rabies vaccination, in case your dog gets lost or bites

someone.

- Do not tether your dog; it promotes aggression and is illegal if done improperly.
- Spay or neuter your dog. Eight-five percent of dog bites are by un-neutered males.

For more dog bite prevention tips, or to report a lost, loose or aggressive dog, contact Animal Services at 530. 621.5795 on the West Slope of El Dorado County or at 530.573.7925 in South Lake Tahoe.

*Henry Brzezinski is El Dorado County Animal Services chief.*