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## Managing dog bite incidences through public education

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**This is not a dog problem; it's a people problem. The major cause of dog bites is irresponsible owners**

### Introduction 简介

Dog bites are a major social and political issue, irresponsible dog owners allowing unsocialised/untrained dogs to roam within the community or allowing unsupervised access to these dogs (particularly of children) leads to people being bitten and the dog being blamed and labelled as a danger. This social issue can quickly develop into a political issue as a section of a community puts pressure upon the authorities to take action and action is often directed directly towards the dog population rather than tackling the problem at its roots by addressing the problem of irresponsible dog ownership.

In previous cases in China this has led to the large scale and often brutal killing of dogs on the streets of China's cities. The most recent and barbaric example being the dog killing campaign in Hanzhong city in June 2009 which saw 40,000 dogs brutally slaughtered. This approach will lead to less dog bites in the short term due to the large scale reduction in dog numbers, therefore providing a short-term political solution but does not address the wider social issue of responsibly managing a dog population within a city to allow both dog owners and non-owners to co-exist harmoniously. As well as being ineffective in the long term this approach is also socially divisive, leading to a breakdown in communication and co-operation between the very people that are integral to managing the situation.

### Dog bite statistics 犬只伤人数据

Accurate dog-bite data is difficult to obtain as most dog bites are not reported unless they require medical attention. Therefore much of the analysis comes from high profile cases involving the larger breeds; in such cases the media negatively portray a specific breed as dangerous and aggressive, leading to political pressure and in many cases governments addressing this situation through breed specific legislation and in many Chinese cities through height restrictions.

Data from the U.S. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, suggests some 4.5 million people nationally are bitten by dogs each year and of those, about 885,000 require medical attention. In 2007 these bites resulted in 33 deaths.

In the UK, despite the introduction of a Dangerous Dogs Act in 1991 intending to reduce attacks by dogs on people, dog bites have continued to rise each year with an estimated 50% rise since 1998-1999. According to the BBC, hospitalizations due to dog bites increased by 25% after the ban. In addition, the RSPCA reports: *there has been a 12-fold increase in reports of dog fighting between 2004 and 2008. The Metropolitan Police Service alone has seized and dealt with 719 dangerous dogs in the 2008-09. In the 2009-2010 they expect to deal with more than 1000 dogs.*

### **Which sector of the population is at greatest risk?**

Many people have an image of a snarling stray dog or an uncontrollable pit bull terrier when they refer to dog bites, yet 50% of dog bites are said to be inflicted by the family dog. The most common victims being children, the American Veterinary Medical Association estimate in the US, nearly 50% of victims are under 12, a second more vulnerable sector of the community are people over 70 years old which account for a further 10% of dog bites. The majority of these bites occur while the dog is either leashed, fenced, chained, or indoors..

In many cases this is due to people, particularly children having unsupervised access to non-trained, non-socialised dogs within the family home a situation that can be addressed through responsible dog ownership.

### **What are the non-breed specific factors influencing dog bites:**

Any dog regardless of breed or size has the potential to cause harm, larger more powerful dogs have the potential to cause greater harm than smaller dogs but this does not mean they are necessarily more likely to cause harm than smaller dogs. A well trained, socialised large and powerful dog such as a bull terrier may pose less threat to the public than an untrained, non-socialised, unsupervised small dog such as a dachshund.

A dog's tendency to bite depends on a number of factors, including:

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- **Care provided by the owner:**
  - Socialisation and training: *all dogs (preferably as a puppy) need to undergo socialisation with other dogs and humans and behavioural training. Socialisation and training must continue into adulthood if appropriate. Owners should discourage all signs of aggressive behaviour as soon as they are observed. Veterinarians and their support staff should encourage owners to start basic obedience training at a very early*

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*age (10 weeks) for most breeds. Obedience training and temperament training, provides the necessary socialization needed for puppies to integrate into society with other dogs and people.*

- - *Are dogs being left unsupervised with children: over 50% of dog bite victims are under 12*
  - *Are dogs trained to be aggressive: In many cases dogs are specifically trained as guard dogs and therefore aggressive attributes and tendencies are encouraged, in other cases the household pet may be encouraged to be aggressive towards strangers approaching the house yet expected to understand that strangers outside of the home pose no threat. This can be a very confusing situation for a dog to understand..*
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- **the dogs medical health:** *a sick or injured dog that is not being treated is likely to present a greater risk than a healthy and happy dog.*
  
  - **has the dog been neutered:** *The American Veterinary Medical Association reports that close to 76 percent of reported dog bites involve unsterilized male dogs. An unsterilized dog is more likely to roam in search of a mate than a sterilized dog and has higher levels of hormones which can lead to a higher tendency to display aggressive behaviour.*
  
  - **behaviour of members of the public and possible victims:** *dogs do not always interpret actions of people in the way that these actions are meant. A perfectly innocent approach by a stranger towards a dog may be seen as a threat to a dog that is timid, eating, protecting a toy, or within its own environment. This can lead to a dog being aggressive as a defence mechanism to a perceived threat.*
  
  - **Heredity:** *Behaviours, like the physical features of a dog, such as its coat colour are always affected to some extent by hereditary influences. Aggression is no exception. Thus, one cannot escape the conclusion that certain breeds are more prone to display certain kinds of aggression when compared with other breeds; many dogs are what they are because of many years of selective breeding for particular behavioural tendencies. **But it is important to remember that not all dogs of a given breed are dangerous***

**Why breed and height specific legislation is ineffective**

Breed-specific legislation can provide a false sense of accomplishment for a governing authority, but may not provide community protection. The responsibility for all dogs, regardless of their breed, must be placed on their guardians. Restricting specific breeds does not address the issues of poor dog ownership and training for such aggressive behaviour (**in the USA, 78% of the 16 fatal dog attacks in 2006 were not maintained as pets, but as guard dogs or fighting dogs**) and can give owners of other non-listed breeds a false sense of security and decrease their desire to seek appropriate socialisation and training for their pets, and therefore does little to protect the community from dog-bite incidents

Authorities rarely have access to people qualified to identify breeds accurately, therefore the breed of a biting dog is often not known or is inaccurately reported. A 2009 study comparing breed identification by adoption agencies with identification by DNA analysis found 87.5% of the dogs identified by an adoption agency as having specific breeds in their ancestry did not have all of those breeds detected by DNA analysis<sup>1</sup>.

Governments across the world have attempted to reduce dog-bite incidents by banning specific breeds. However, the World Veterinary Service states: *“There is no evidence to suggest that these effectively reduce the frequency or severity of dog-bite injuries to people.”* (WVA, 2002)

*“Breed-specific legislation has been shown to be difficult to apply due to the problem of defining breeds and breed types..... engenders a false and dangerous perception that breeds not included will not show aggression. Aggression is a normal behaviour and can be shown by any dog of any breed, type or mixed breeding. Breed-specific legislation does not discriminate between individual members of a breed, many of which may not be predisposed to aggressive behaviour. Rather, all dogs of a specific breed, whatever their behaviour, are subject to the same restrictions.”* – **British Veterinary Association**

**Animals Asia recommends community education and responsible dog ownership as the most effective means of minimising problems associated with aggressive dog behaviour, animal abandonment and the transmission of communicable diseases, such as rabies**

### **USA 美国**

Nearly 300 communities in the U.S. have implemented "dangerous dog" laws that do not single out specific breeds, but concentrate on responsible dog ownership and regulating all dogs which show signs of aggression.

### **Netherlands 荷兰**

The Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Gerda Verburg, in reference to the ban on pit bulls said, there had been no decrease in the number of biting incidents during the 15 years in which the ban had been in place. Instead of this policy, the emphasis will now be placed on making sure that local leash laws are being enforced and on education programmes.

### **Italy 意大利**

In April 2009, the Italian government removed its ban on 17 breeds of dog, replacing it with a law making owners more responsible for their pets' training and behaviour. The new law is built on the foundation that any dog, regardless of breed, can potentially be dangerous and it puts the moral and legal responsibility on the owner for a dog's behaviour.

*Italian Health Undersecretary Francesca Martini said, "This is a historic day because we have established for the first time the responsibility of the owner or the person who is momentarily in charge of the animal." Martini added that the previous law had no scientific foundation and compared it to a "fig leaf over the larger problem".*

The new law forbids training dogs to be aggressive using sticks and protective body gear, doping, surgery that is not for health purposes and dangerous cross-breeding. The law also makes veterinarians responsible for compiling a register of individual dogs who they believe may be potentially high-risk, requiring owners to keep those pets muzzled in public.

### **UK 英国**

In January 2010, an independent inquiry into dog breeding in the UK recommends the dangerous dogs act should be amended to apply to all dogs that have been shown to be dangerous rather than to specified breeds and should address the problems of dogs being bred and reared specifically as weapons or for fighting.

### **Scotland 苏格兰**

In April 2010, the Scottish Parliament passed the Control of Dogs (Scotland) Bill focusing on the "deed and not the breed" of the dog. Under the new legislation, more responsibility is placed on the owners of badly-behaved dogs. Owners who fail to comply with the dog control notices could be forced to keep their pet on a lead at all times, have it neutered, attend special training courses or face a fine of up to £1,000.

**How can we reduce dog bites through education and responsible pet ownership**

Dog bites are a largely preventable public health problem, and adults and children can learn to reduce their chances of being bitten. A community approach is essential in the development of a public education initiative to encourage greater responsibility among dog-owners for population management and the care and welfare of individual animals.

This education initiative centres on

- bite-prevention;
- caring for dogs to meet their welfare needs; Nutrition, housing and medical care
- responsible dog ownership;
  - Compliance with licensing regulations
  - Behaviour training
  - supervision of dog and child interactions
  - Appropriate pet selection
- promoting the importance of neutering surgery to reduce roaming and aggression in male dogs, plus related health benefits;
- promoting the importance of, and access to, preventative treatments such as rabies vaccination and parasite-control;
- and knowledge of normal and abnormal canine behaviour in both owned and non-owned dogs.

The key personnel to be included within an education programme and elements of that educational message are:

1. Public officials and community leaders
2. Veterinarians and technicians:
  - Educate dog owners on acceptable and non-acceptable dog behaviour
  - Refer dogs and owners to dog training
  - Provide advice for prospective owners on the suitability of specific breeds for a household. Dogs with histories of aggression are inappropriate in households with children
  - Provide advice for owners with new puppies when they come to clinic for immunisation
  - Provide continued advice for dog owners on subsequent visits
  - Provide information on the health and behavioural benefits of neutering
3. Dog Trainers
  - Need to be assessed for methods used and competence, dog trainers are only part of the solution as we need to train both the dogs and the owners

4. Physicians and Nurses

- Providing advice to victims can be very effective in preventing future injuries.

5. Local Authority Animal Management Personnel

- Provide education in schools
- Train teachers, nurses and volunteers in dog bite prevention.

6. Humane Society Personnel

- Have an opportunity to assess potential dog owners. Dogs with histories of aggression are inappropriate in households with children
- Educate owner's responsible pet ownership and dog bite prevention.
- Ensure dogs are neutered

7. General Public: The public are a critical element of an effective education programme. Studies estimate 50% of dog bites are inflicted by the family dog.

- Children are the most common victim; the most vulnerable age is 5-9 year olds. High risk due to proximity of face to the dog. Education on behaviour around dogs
  - Do not approach an unfamiliar dog.
  - Do not run from a dog or scream.
  - Remain motionless (e.g., "be still like a tree") when approached by an unfamiliar dog.
  - If knocked over by a dog, roll into a ball and lie still (e.g., "be still like a log").
  - Do not play with a dog unless supervised by an adult.
  - Immediately report stray dogs or dogs displaying unusual behaviour to an adult.
  - Avoid direct eye contact with a dog.
  - Do not disturb a dog that is sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
  - Do not pet a dog without allowing it to see and sniff you first.
  - If bitten, immediately report the bite to an adult.
- Generate commitment from school to get dog bite prevention into the curriculum
- Adults can learn appropriate behaviour to protect themselves, teach children, serve as examples to others
- Active adults very important such as cyclists, joggers and golfers as increased exposure to dogs. Can provide dog bite prevention information to recreational facilities
- Target adults with children that are active
- Elderly have an increased susceptibility. In addition older people often own dogs that have not been socialised around children. Dog bite prevention information can be provided through community services, centres etc. Targeting grandparents with dogs.

- Victims can be provided with information on dog bite prevention at hospital.

#### 8. Animal Owners

- Need to educate owners that in addition to providing food and water, dog care involves licensing, vaccination and providing training.
- Spend time with a dog before buying or adopting it. Use caution when bringing a dog into the home of an infant or toddler. Spay/neuter all dogs (this frequently reduces aggressive tendencies).
- Never leave infants or young children alone with any dog.
- Do not play aggressive games with your dog (e.g., wrestling).
- Properly socialize and train any dog entering the household. Teach the dog submissive behaviours (e.g., rolling over to expose abdomen and relinquishing food without growling).
- Immediately seek professional advice (e.g., from veterinarians, animal behaviourists, or responsible breeders) if the dog develops aggressive or undesirable behaviours

#### 9. Pet Related Businesses: Responsible Pet Ownership and Dog Bite Prevention information can be provided to dog owners through:

- Vet clinics
- Pet shops
- Grooming parlours
- Boarding facilities
- Dog Trainers (provide incentives to attend such as reduced licence fees, vaccination coupons, food coupons)
- Animal shelter to provide classes to prospective owners

#### 10. Media: A dog management programme needs a spokesperson provided with media training, this person should be able to turn a dog bite incident into a dog bite prevention opportunity

#### **Develop a post-bite program**

- Investigation of an incident by animal control personnel
- Provide a post-bite rabies quarantine programme – a 10 day period including day of the bite. Vaccinated dogs can be home quarantined if safe to do so. Non-vaccinated dogs should be treated as rabies suspects and provided appropriate treatment. If the dog shows signs of rabies in should be humanely euthanized.

#### **Bite Data Reporting & Management**



This is an essential element of a dog bite prevention programme and will allow for unbiased, informed decision making. This will need an administrator to identify multiple reports of the same incident, provide an electronic and rapid response, review data periodically and identify trends. All sectors of the community should report bites including animal control agencies, health personnel, community leaders and vets. This data will help define:

- Victim demographics
- High risk geographical areas
- Owner characteristics

### **Canada: Calgary, a model city**

The City of Calgary has significantly reduced dog bite incidents without enacting Breed Specific Legislation. Instead they have established humane education programs, and work closely with local animal rescue groups and various city/government departments to identify and penalize reckless owners. In 2008 attacks by aggressive dogs were the lowest they've been in 25 years.

In 2006 the animal bylaw services team incorporated bylaws which holds owners responsible for their dog's behaviour. The law prohibits leaving a dog unattended, and dogs are never allowed to be chained or tethered outside the house unless someone is home. Fines are issued to dog owners if their dog does bite, a minor bite is a \$350 fine and a serious offense is \$1,500. The City provides a humane education program to teach responsible dog ownership and this has been incorporated into the school curriculum. If a dog bites, the city send in a team of investigators to ascertain the reasons for the aggressive behaviour and provide advice and support to prevent the situation happening again. The costs of the scheme are met through a dog licensing scheme.

The success of the scheme is based upon community involvement, in Calgary the post office, humane society, rescue groups and local government all work together to identify dangerous dogs and hold dog owners accountable for the management and care for their dogs,.

### **Recommendations**

Animals Asia recommends governments adopt legislation that puts the responsibility on the owner and addresses issues of behaviour in all breeds. This includes appropriate laws focusing on the responsibility of the dog's guardian, education initiatives and penalties for irresponsible owners:

- Enforce generic, non-breed-specific dangerous-dog laws;
- Introduce education programmes for children and adults to prevent dog bites and provide information on what to do if a dog bites;
- Introduce education programmes for dog owners in the appropriate methods of socialisation of puppies to humans and other dogs at an early age;
- Educate professionals, such as veterinarians and dog trainers, in the appropriate methods of socialisation;

- Promote dog training and puppy-socialisation classes within dog communities;
- Encourage vet staff and humane-shelter personnel to provide advice on appropriate breed choice to prospective dog owners;
- Introduce education programmes for prospective dog owners on appropriate pet selection;
- Introduce legislation focused on the responsible activity of the owner;
- Enforce leash laws and movement bans on dogs deemed as potentially dangerous, plus muzzles for dogs that have shown aggressive behaviour;
- Introduce penalties to ban individuals from owning dogs if they mistreat them or continue to act irresponsibly;
- Mandatory identification through microchipping and identity tags of all dogs to link an individual dog with the person legally responsible for the animal;
- Carry out public surveys on dog bites to generate background information and to allow for the monitoring of the efficiency of control measures
- Develop a database to collect data on dogs involved in aggressive incidents
- Restricting people with criminal convictions from owning certain large dog breeds, to prevent people acquiring dogs for criminal purposes or for dog fighting;
- Prohibit dog-fighting; and
- Introduce education programmes highlighting the benefits of neutering and spaying and encouraging neutering/spaying within the community.

***Animals Asia would like to see governments adopt laws that establish a fair community-based process by which specific dogs (not breeds) can be identified as “dangerous” based on stated, measurable actions and the development of appropriate penalties for irresponsible dog owners.***

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