Frequently Asked Questions: Bite Wounds

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Do all bite injuries require veterinary attention?
It is important that a veterinarian perform a full physical examination on any patient that has suffered a bite wound because the smallest wound may be just the tip of the iceberg.

What should I do before I bring my pet to the veterinarian?
Use special care when handling and transporting your pet because he may be painful or distressed from the trauma. Because animals may bite their owner under stressful circumstances, a muzzle may be required. Safely place your pet in a carrier or wrap him in blankets and towels for security while in transit.

Acquire as much information as possible about the attacker. If the attacker was an owned animal, gather its health records and proof of rabies vaccination. The attacker should also be examined by a veterinary professional for subtle injuries. Contact your local police if you wish to pursue legal action. If the attacker was a wild animal, contact your local animal control agency to report the incident and have the animal captured for rabies testing, if possible.

Will my pet need to be revaccinated for rabies?
If your pet has never received a rabies vaccination and is bitten by a potentially rabid animal, immediate euthanasia and rabies testing is indicated. If you are unwilling to take these steps, your pet may enter strict isolation for 6 months, with a rabies vaccination administered at the onset of the isolation period or one month before release.

If your pet is past due for a rabies vaccination and is bitten by a potentially rabid animal, protocols will be implemented on a case-by-case basis, depending on state regulations; typical protocols include observation, isolation, and revaccination.

Any pet that is currently up-to-date on the rabies vaccination and bitten by a potentially rabid animal should be revaccinated immediately and monitored for 45 days.¹

Note: These guidelines are based on the 2011 Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control,¹ but regulations may vary from state to state. Consult your public health official for the most accurate and up-to-date local recommendations.

How do I prevent bite wounds?
Keep your pet on a leash or closely monitored at all times. Be aware of your pet’s response to other animals and avoid interactions with unfamiliar animals. Remove your pet from stressful situations before conflict arises.

See Aids & Resources, back page, for references & suggested reading.