

WHY DOG BITE CASES HAVE INCREASED DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC 2020

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Our lives rapidly changed in the short weeks of March 2020 when Covid 19 affected the world. Not only were our normal daily schedules turned upside down, so were the lives of animals and our pets. One ripple effect has been the uptick in dog bites. In our metro area of Atlanta, one county reported a 50% increase in dog bite calls from March to April 2020. In early April, Minneapolis orders all dogs to be leashed after increase in dog bites. According to Minneapolis Animal Care and Control, in March 2019, they saw 25 reports of bites or aggression. In March 2020, that rose to 45 incidents, an 80% increase from last year.

Here are the reasons why:

- Online shopping and more deliveries being made causes an increase in dog bites. To really grasp what that means, check out these statistics. In March 2, 2020, it was reported that the number of Amazon Prime members in the United States is projected to reach almost 143 million users in 2022 -- up from 124 million in 2019. In addition the U.S. Postal Service [reports](#) that it adds 4,071 addresses to its delivery network daily and processes and delivers 187.8 million pieces of First-Class Mail per day. By the way, many of the dog attacks against postal workers and delivery personnel, takes place at the customer's door. Dogs tend to be more protective if family members are near them and when deliveries are made, they too come to the door or may be outside already. "Dogs are dogs, and that is their territory." In 2015, when online shipping really started, the postal service added a new feature to the handheld devices used to scan packages: "Trip Hazards," to warn of pitfalls along a route -- unsafe steps, ice, downed wires and vicious dogs. By the way, if the local post office determines it is not safe for other Postal workers to make deliveries in the area because of your dog, delivery can be discontinued for the entire block.
- Most of the time a dog bite occurs from the family dog biting a family member or a guest of the family member. Since more people are home for longer periods of time, the chances of dog bites occurring is higher. Be careful with kid's play dates.
- The family dynamic has changed. During these sudden major readjustments, it is easy to overlook the fact that pets in the family are also disturbed and confused by the sudden change in familiar habits. With the increased stress of an uncertain future, it is also easy for their humans to forget to lock gates and assure that everyone closes front and back doors to keep

- pets secure. Also, too many people in the home may mean the family dog stays outside for longer than it is accustomed to. Some families without proper enclosures are chaining their dogs.
- Some people are dumping dogs because of fear of getting Covid 19 from their pet. Our organization did a webinar on that issue April 9, 2020, check it out [here](#)). We discussed the news reports of two dogs, one cat, and tigers in the NY zoo contracting Covid 19. Veterinary science experts explain that pets cannot transmit the virus to humans, but it is being monitored closely since viruses can mutate.
- Some people are dumping dogs because their income has been affected and they cannot afford to keep their dogs. If an animal shelter is not taking owner's surrenders (and some are not) people will dump their dogs which increase the amounts of strays on the streets. Making things worse are stray dogs packing up and become more aggressive.
- Some people are adopting new dogs due to their new lifestyle change. In fact, many shelters are reporting high adoption rates. However, the new owners may experience problems because the new adopted dog does not get along with existing pets or the new owners have not properly introduce the new dog allowing it to acclimate well and lastly, the new owners just don't know the nuances of having a new dog in the home.
- We are seeing a spike in domestic violence reports and filing for TPOs as well as divorce filings. Why? Because people who were used to a routine and not having to be around their spouses/kids all the time, cannot handle the change in dynamics. In homes where domestic violence was prevalent, it seems to be worse and in homes with little abuse, it is beginning. Aggression and tension may be taken out of family pets – so there is an uptick in pet abuse which affects the numbers in dog bites. Children can also abuse the family pet and the pet can react by biting the child.
- More people are offering to foster dogs because of animal shelters being full. More dogs with unknown histories and fosters unsure of how to provide for that dog translates into more dog bites.
- More people walking their dogs outside interact with other dogs either on leashes or roaming. Most of the dog bites we see are from dog owners trying to stop a dog fight while walking their dogs or at dog parks.
- Lack of pet food or access to it, means some pet owners are feeding their dogs less. A hungry dog can increase aggression.
- More people who changed their workspace are moving dogs into different/new spaces.



TIPS:

NEVER SAY: “My dog won’t bite”. That is impossible to predict because a dog may get startled, feel sick or just not feel comfortable around someone or thing. The only way they can defend themselves is with their mouth or noises (growling, barking, whining)

KEEP YOUR DOG SAFELY IN A CLOSED ROOM DURING MAIL, PACKAGE & FOOD DELIVERIES.

When the mail delivery is made, children (who are usually at school during the day), often run out to greet the carrier -- with the family dog bolting out with them (or with an adult.) However, the dog may not identify the delivery person as a positive experience. Your dog, who may be protective, can perceive the stranger in a uniform as threat just the reaching out of the hand by the delivery person can be an aggressive gesture in the eyes of your dog. Even minor attacks hurt, resulting in time off work, workers comp claims and has a serious ripple effect. Keep your dog contained when someone comes to your door. Provide a visual barrier between your dog (whether kept inside or outside) and the delivery person routes.

USE NEW TECHNOLOGY Informed Delivery®, is a free USPS notification feature that allows consumers to receive digital images of their incoming mail and manage package delivery. Users can see the images in a digest e-mailed to them or through an online dashboard.

SERVICE ANIMALS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT ANIMALS (ESA) ARE SUBJECT TO DANGEROUS DOG LAWS: An owner of a service animal or ESA, cannot hide behind disability laws should their dog pose a threat or harm a person or another person’s pet. Service animals and ESA animals can be impounded and held for cases in dog attack cases even though they may provide a service to the dog owner.

BE CAREFUL AT DOG PARKS: Dog parks offer a great place where your pup can let loose, run free, socialize and play with other doggies without the worry of cars or bicyclist causing harm. Even though your county or city has a leash law, your allowed to remove the leash inside the dog park. Both of you can make new friends and go home well-exercised and ready for a nap. However, dog attack cases are on the rise at dog parks. However, the assumption of risk, couple with posted warning signs and/or dog park rules changes legal remedies available to the injured party or injured pet owner. When entering a dog park, a dog owner takes on a certain assumption of risk and may even waive certain rights when entering the dog park. As a dog owner you still must be in control of your dog and a parent can be found negligent for unsupervised children, even if the child who gets bit. Dog parks are merely places where dogs can be off-leash, but liability for dog bites that occur there can be a little different than for those that happen elsewhere. And sometimes, damages can be severe and include punitive damages if one can prove owner of an attacking dog had prior knowledge of the propensity to do harm or if the owner acted wanton or recklessly. Injuries can include being bitten, jumped on, or knocked down and the dog(s) causing the injury could be playing or aggressive. Georgia courts will look at whether the signs outside the dog park sufficiently warned a victim of the risks inside, if the victim actually consented to, or assumed the risk of, potential injuries, and how the defendant dog owner acted and what his/her prior knowledge of his/her dog’s behavior to cause injury.



Every dog park should be a fun experience but here are some important things to think about:

- Clearly posted signs should establish dog park rules at all entrances of dog park.
- No dog should be left unattended by its owner.
- An age limit should be clearly posted. A child should not be allowed to bring their dog in without an adult accompanying them.
- Children should never be left unattended.
- No dogs allowed if classified as dangerous or vicious or previously have bitten or injured a person or another animal.
- Limit the number of dogs one person can bring.
- At least one gate that securely latches is necessary but good dog parks have two gates so that a dog rushing through the first cannot get past the second.
- Users should be advised that they will be using the park at their own risk, including but not limited to the risk of being bitten, being knocked down, tripping, etc.
- Every dog must wear a collar & have proper rabies tag
- Every dog must be current on its vaccinations
- No dogs allowed that are known to initiate fights with other dogs.
- Don't assume dogs are not aggressive just because they look playful. Dogs can be over aggressive and not socialized properly.
- Don't try to break up a fight by inserting your hand or body. Use your voice first.
- Don't make the mistake of saying "my dog doesn't bite" or trust another when the same statement is made to you. All dogs bite and no one can guarantee when a dog is startled, not feeling well, or is scared. Stress can cause a dog to bite.
- Prominently posted address for complaints. There is a prominently posted address for complaints.

For more information on dog bite law or your rights as a victim or dog owner, contact info@animallawsource.org, Copyright 2020, Claudine Wilkins