

Dog Attacks

Rockhampton Regional Council investigates numerous dog attacks in the Rockhampton Region every year. Attacks by dogs on humans, other companion animals and livestock can be prevented in most cases by being a responsible pet owner and interacting safely with other people's dogs.

It is an offence under the *Animal Management (Cat and Dogs) Act 2008* to allow or encourage a dog to attack or cause fear to someone else or another animal. Offenders can be issued with an on-the-spot fine or be prosecuted.

Why do dogs attack?

All dogs have the capacity to cause harm or injury to another animal or person, especially children and the elderly.

A dog's likelihood of biting can depend on many interacting factors such as:

- early experiences
- socialisation and training
- health (physical and psychological)
- the behaviour of the victim
- territorial defence.



What measures can I take to prevent a dog attack?

- Ensure your dog has an effective enclosure and is unable to escape over, under or through the fence or other type of boundary in which it is kept.
- Ensure your dog is always under effective control in a public place and held by a lead no longer than two metres.
- You must be able to physically control your dog.
- Take time to understand basic dog behaviour and use appropriate training techniques such as positive reinforcement (praise not punishment) to help train them.
- Training and socialising your dog decreases its fear, anxiety and aggression towards other dogs and people.
- Training improves a dog's ability to cope with new situations.
- Desexing your dog can decrease the risk of it wandering or displaying aggressive behaviour.
- Male entire dogs (dogs that have not been desexed) are a greater risk of displaying increased aggression through guarding behaviour.
- Entire females add to the risk by attracting males.

Educate your family

Teach your family to be calm, respectful and gentle around dogs.

Never approach a dog that is:

- sleeping, eating or chewing a bone
- playing with its toys
- injured or sick
- in its kennel, on its bed, in a car
- on the back of a ute or tied up
- fighting or play fighting
- behind a fence or gate; or with its puppies
- not with its owner and unfamiliar with you.



If approached by an unknown dog:

- stand very still and do not run, as the dog may chase
- be very quiet, curl fingers and keep arms down by sides
- look away from the dog, not into its eyes
- wait for the dog to go away
- tell an adult what happened.

Suggestions that may help in a dog attack situation

Note: All dog attacks are different and these suggestions may not stop a dog attack

- always allow the dog room to escape
- stay calm, **DON'T RUN** you may trigger a 'chase response'
- don't scream or squeal (high pitched sounds may startle the dog and cause it to respond)
- don't make any sudden movements (dogs have an instinctive reflex to chase moving objects).
- try to ignore the dog
- avoid eye contact; however don't lose sight of the dog (dogs use eye contact to 'size you up')
- use anything in your hand as a shield not as a weapon

- act confidently (fear or anxiety may increase the probability of you being bitten).

If a dog latches on to you in an attack **DO NOT FIGHT THE BITE**. Resisting the bite by pulling back away from the dog may cause the dog to thrash and pull back; this can in turn create a worse injury. If you do find yourself in this situation try to remain as calm as possible, call for assistance or try and break the dogs concentration with a loud noise such as a whistle to get the dog to release.

Your dog and children

A child's natural behaviours including running, yelling, hitting and darting movements, as well as pulling at the dog's fur put them at greater risk of dog bite injuries.

Always supervise children as bites tend to occur when they are playing, patting or disturbing a dog while it is sleeping or eating.

The proximity of a child's face to the dog also increases the risk of facial injuries.

Children should:

- always ask the owner's permission before approaching a dog
- not approach a dog while it is sleeping, eating or caring for its puppies
- not be unsupervised around your dogs
- if allowed by the owner, stroke the dog's back but avoid the dog's head
- avoid hugging dogs
- avoid prolonged eye contact or putting their face in the dog's face.



Impact on victims

Being bitten or attacked by a dog can produce serious physical or physiological and emotional affects, not only for the person who is attacked but also for the owner of the attacking dog.

Even if the victim is not bitten, the threat of the attack can cause lasting trauma.

What do I do if a dog attack has occurred?

Seek medical assistance and treatment immediately. Notify and report the incident to Council's Local Laws unit on 4932 9000 as soon as possible after the incident. Record details of the incident as soon as practicable to assist in your recollection of events. When dealing with a dog attack, Council can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week through its call centre.

Key elements to recall

- date and time and location of attack
- description of the dog, such as colour, breed, size and specific identifying features
- details of the dog's owner (if known)
- details of any people who may have helped you.

Remember that reporting the incident as soon as possible is essential. With this information appropriate action can be taken by Council to investigate and minimise further risk to the community.

How Council handles a dog attack

Upon receiving a dog attack report, a Local Laws Officer will investigate the alleged attack by collecting evidence from all parties involved and, depending on the severity of the attack, there could be a number of outcomes.

If a dog attacks or injures another person or animal:

- fines may be issued to the owner; and
- the dog may be declared a "Regulated (dangerous or menacing) Dog" and the owner will be responsible for stringent controls as well as an annual Regulated (dangerous or menacing) Dog registration fee.
- the dog will be under strict enclosure and control rules set by state law.
- the owner may face legal action from Council and civil action from person attacked.
- in some circumstances the dog may be seized and/or destroyed by Council.

For more information phone Council's Local Laws Unit on 4932 9000.

LL070817