

Dog bites a particular threat to young children, especially as temperatures rise

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Young children are especially vulnerable to severe dog bites in the head and neck areas, and there is a correlation between cases of dog bites and rising temperatures, according to new research published in the March 2009 issue of *Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery*.

In an evaluation of 84 cases of dog bites in children over an eight-year period, the authors found that most injuries were caused by family pets (27%), with a high frequency of injuries occurring during the summer months. While the reason for this is unknown, the authors suggest it may be because of children spending time outdoors playing with dogs in the warmer temperatures, or due to a general increase in the irritability of dogs during the warmer months.

The most common sites of bites to the head and neck were the cheeks (34%), lips (21%), and nose and ears (both 8%). Sixty-four percent suffered wounds in more than one location, with the average wound size 7.15 cm. Pit bulls were the breed most commonly cited as the cause for the attack.

The authors believe that by implementing more accurate and timely reporting of dog bites to local health authorities, medical professionals can be educated on how to identify trends and develop prevention strategies. The authors recommend a system for uniform data collection to include the circumstances of the dog bite (signs of provocation, adequacy of child supervision, breed of dog, sex of animal, spay/neuter status, history of prior aggression of the dog, dog restraint, time of event,

patients previous histories of dog bites, length of dog ownership, location where dog bite injury occurred, disposition of dog afterwards, and vaccination profile rabies/tetanus). Furthermore, families should be made aware of the increased likelihood of dog bite injuries during the summer months.

It is estimated that 1 percent of all emergency room visits can be attributed to dog bite injuries, including 44,000 annual cases of facial injuries in the United States alone.

Source: American Academy of Otolaryngology -- Head and Neck Surgery

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