

Pandemic unleashes 'startling' rise in dog bites

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(HealthDay)—Lockdowns gave people lots to growl about. Their dogs

may have felt a bit more aggressive, too.

A [pediatric emergency department](#) in Colorado saw nearly three times as many [children](#) with injuries from [dog bites](#) this spring compared to last year at the same time, prompting concerns that stay-at-home orders and other COVID-19-related lifestyle changes may be to blame.

In a commentary published recently in the *Journal of Pediatrics*, physicians from Children's Hospital Colorado reported the significant increase in dog bite injuries seen in their [emergency department](#) since March. They also provided some strategies to prevent these injuries.

"It is well known that the number of dog bites tends to increase during the spring and summer months," said Dr. Cinnamon Dixon, an attending physician at the hospital. "However, this year's rates of emergency department visits due to dog bites have been startling."

She added that "these findings are likely not unique to Colorado nor this institution."

According to the researchers, the increase in dog bite rates began when stay-at-home orders were initiated in March. Still, the high rates have continued even as these orders went away.

"There are approximately 82 million children and 77 million pet [dogs](#) in the U.S. who are all living in some variation of restriction," Dixon said. "Families across the country are living under [extreme stress](#) and angst during the pandemic, and our canine friends are not immune to their human caregivers' increased anxiety."

The researchers identified some factors that may have contributed to the increase in dog bites during the pandemic:

- Increased child-dog exposure earlier in the year because of shelter-in-place regulations
- Heightened stress for dogs as they pick up on amplified household stress
- Decreased [adult supervision](#) around dogs and children as adults juggle increased responsibilities at home

Children and teenagers suffer more than 40% of the dog bite injuries that require [emergency care](#), according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Dogs can be amazing companions and enrich our lives in so many ways; however it's important to remember that any dog can bite given the right circumstance," Dixon said. "Recognizing the intense pressures and responsibilities that families are under, it is critical that parents and caregivers of children prioritize the best way to prevent dog bites—which is to always, always supervise infants and children whenever they are near a dog."

She recommended teaching children to never disturb a dog who is caring for puppies, eating or sleeping; never reach through a fence to pet a dog, and never run from a dog.

She also said it's important for dog owners to keep their dogs healthy, maintain routine veterinary care, and properly train and socialize their dogs.

More information: There's more about preventing dog bites at the [www.aspc.org/pet-care/dog-care ... /dog-bite-prevention](http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/dog-care.../dog-bite-prevention) " target="_new">American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).

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