

Dog Bite – First Aid

Being bitten by a dog can bring scary thoughts of rabies infection, to many of us. In general, many people associate all dog bites with rabies infection. It is not so. A dog may bite, when it feels there is a threat to its position. Certain dogs are aggressive by nature and may bite at the slightest provocation. Whatever the case, here are some first aid tips to help you, if you happen to see someone being bitten by a dog.

Is every dog bite dangerous?

No, only a bite from a dog that is infected or carrying the rabies virus, is dangerous. Of course, suitable measures have to be taken to prevent the possibility of secondary infections by other bacteria or tetanus. It is a common mistake to assume that every accidental dog bite can lead to rabies infection.

What should be done immediately after a dog bite?

- First of all, the wound should be wiped clean of any saliva if the dog is suspected to be rabid (infected by rabies). The cloth used should be discarded and care taken not to touch the saliva. Instead, the wound should be washed well with soap and running water.
- After drying, the wound should not be closed if it is a puncture wound, but it may be covered with a dry dressing if there is a cut or laceration.
- The person should be taken to the doctor immediately.
- Since there is a chance of being infected with tetanus, the doctor will administer an injection containing tetanus vaccine.
- The owner of the dog should be informed and the dog taken to a Veterinarian immediately, to check for symptoms of rabies.
- The dog should not be killed, but should be kept under observation for 10-15 days to see whether it develops symptoms of rabies. If it does not develop symptoms within 10 days, then chances are that it is not infected by rabies. There have been cases reported where the dog does not show symptoms of rabies, but still carried the virus. That is why it is important to ask the owner, whether the dog has been vaccinated and whether it has been behaving normally. In every case, a dog bite should be judged by its own merits. If there is a suspicion of the dog being infected with rabies, it is better to take the course of anti-rabies treatment to provide immunity against the disease.

What are the types of vaccines available for protection against rabies?

There are many types of anti-rabies vaccine available: The Human Diploid Cell Vaccine, Vero-Cell Purified Vaccine, Purified Chick Embryo Vaccine and the less expensive Nerve Tissue Vaccine. The human diploid cell vaccine or the Purified Vero-Cell Rabies vaccine is most often recommended for post-exposure prophylaxis. It is given in 5 doses on days 0, 3, 7, 14 and 28. This is usually sufficient to protect a person from rabies, but people in whom the immune system is weak, may need an extra dose on the 90th day.

Is there any other treatment available for rabies?

Passive immunization in the form of immune globulin is available in many countries. This is administered soon after the exposure to rabies infection and followed up with the anti-rabies vaccine. The doctor may administer the required dosage, into and around the wound and inject the remaining vaccine in the gluteal region (buttocks).