

What should I know about animal bites?

It is estimated that half of all Americans will be bitten by an animal (or another human being) during their lifetimes. The vast majority of the estimated 2 million annual animal bite wounds are minor, and the victims never seek medical attention. The most common bites are from cats, dogs, and rodents. Most minor bites are harmless and will heal on their own with proper treatment. However, it is important for an adult or healthcare provider to watch the injured area closely for infection.

What steps would I take after an animal bite?

Wash all bite wounds thoroughly with soap and water. Place a clean dressing on the wounds. Contact your healthcare provider if you have not had a tetanus shot within the last 5 years or if the wound starts becoming infected.

What are normal symptoms of a bite?

Most bites from animals result in some bruising. Blue or yellow discoloration is normal in the surrounding skin. Some swelling at the bite may occur, but should go away after a few days.

CONTACT YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

- Swelling increases after the third day
- There is redness or streaking, or if there is excessive drainage, especially if it's yellow, tan, green, or foul fluid.
- You develop a fever greater than 101°F (38.3°C) orally
- The bite is on the face or neck
- The wound is abnormally large, with prolonged bleeding and no evidence of healing. Larger lacerations may require stitches.
- You have not had a tetanus shot in the past 5 years.
- You were bitten by an unknown wild animal.

Are some animals at higher risk than others for rabies?

If a rodent (rabbit, hamster, gerbil, or mouse) caused the bite, no further action is usually needed. However, if the biting animal is a dog, cat, ferret, or other large animal contact your healthcare provider and local county health department for rabies assessment. If you are bitten by a wild animal or an unknown pet, try to keep it in view while you notify animal control authorities for help in capturing it. **DO NOT** go near an animal or try to catch it yourself.

How can I prevent animal bites and protect myself from illness?

- Never pet, handle, or feed unknown animals.
- Do not keep wild animals as pets; learn to enjoy them at a distance.
- Watch your children closely around animals.
- Vaccinate your cats, ferrets, and dogs against rabies regularly.
- If an animal looks sick to you, don't touch it.
- Do not take food or drinks in animal areas.
- If clothes become dirty from animal waste, change out of them before wearing them in your house.
- Kids that regularly handle and clean-up after livestock should have a separate pair of shoes they only wear outside.
- **ALWAYS** wash your hands with soap and water after touching animals and before eating.

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