

**Patient
Information**

Dog and cat bites

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about what you should do following a dog or a cat bite and provides advice for those who have been treated in the Emergency Department following an animal bite.

About 200,000 dog bites happen each year in the United Kingdom. Cat bites are less common.

Getting help

Animal and human bites can become infected if they are not assessed and treated promptly. Animals have bacteria in their mouths that can cause an infection if your skin is broken (cut or scratched) when you are bitten. Therefore, you should always seek medical advice unless the wound is very minor.

Wounds that are large, deep or dirty are best cleaned by a nurse. Minor bites and scratches should be rinsed under a cold water tap.

If you need to attend hospital a clean damp towel or cling film is a suitable temporary dressing.

Severe bites or multiple bites

If the bite is bleeding, apply pressure to the wound using a clean damp towel. Keep the affected limb raised if possible. If a part of the body such as a finger or toe has been bitten off, wash it in tap water and seal it in a container or polythene bag. You should then place the container or bag in a tub of iced water. Do not put the body part in direct contact with ice. It may be necessary to call 999 if there is severe blood loss or skin loss.

Do not use antiseptics solutions or creams as they may damage the skin tissue and delay healing.

Reference No.

GHPI0819_04_19

Department

**Emergency
Department**

Review due

April 2022

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Wound care

You should clean the wound no matter how small the cut to the skin.

Most wounds will need to be reviewed by a nurse, doctor or pharmacist within the first couple of hours.

Gaping wounds may need to be pulled together with sticky tape.

Open cuts to the face or head are usually closed as soon as possible.

For cuts to other parts of the body, the doctor may wait for a few days before closing the wound, particularly if the wound is more than 6 hours old. This is to make sure that the wound is not infected before closing it.

Antibiotics

A short course of antibiotics may be prescribed to prevent infection developing particularly if your resistance to infection is low.

Tetanus

A booster is not needed if you have had the full schedule of immunisations. You may be advised to check with your GP's surgery to make sure that you are covered.

Rabies

This is a serious illness passed to humans from some animal bites. At present the United Kingdom is free from rabies. Animal bites (particularly dog bites) that happen abroad have a risk of rabies.

When abroad, the risk of rabies must be taken very seriously and you must seek medical treatment straight away.

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What to look out for after a dog or cat bite?

The most common complication following a bite is an infection of the wound. See your GP if the skin surrounding a wound becomes more tender, painful, swollen or inflamed over the next few days. Sometimes bacteria can get into your bloodstream through a wound and cause a serious infection in the body.

You should also see your GP if you become generally unwell with a fever (high temperature), shivers or other worrying symptoms within a week or so after a dog or cat bite.

Further information

For further advice and general information please contact your GP or call NHS 111.

NHS 111

Tel: 111

Patient

Website: www.patient.co.uk/health/dogand-cat-bites

NHS Choices

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/animal-and-human-bites/

Content reviewed: April 2019