

How to treat cat & dog bites

Family pets, stray dogs and cats or neighborhood animals can all bite. Do you know what to do if you or your child gets a bite?



WHAT TO DO NOW

Right away, you should:

- Wash the skin wound with soap and water.
- If it's bleeding, use a clean towel to gently press down on the area.
- Once bleeding has stopped, apply a sterile bandage.



SHOULD I CALL A DOCTOR?

Some bites may need medical care. Call your doctor if:

- You think it might be infected. Look for fever, redness, swelling, warmth and drainage.
- You can't get the bleeding to stop after pressing on it for 15 minutes.
- You think the injury is serious or it looks deep.
- You think there might be a broken bone.
- You have diabetes or a weakened immune system.
- Your last tetanus shot was more than 5 years ago. Or, you don't remember when you last had a tetanus shot.
- You were bit by a wild or stray animal.
- The bite was on the face.
- The bite happened to a child.
- You don't know if the animal is up to date on all its vaccines (shots).



DO I NEED A RABIES SHOT?

Most cats and dogs in the U.S. don't have rabies. So most people who get bit by a cat or dog don't need to get a rabies shot.

Many wild animals can have rabies, though. Raccoons, skunks, squirrels, bats and coyotes may have it.

If you know the owner of the cat or dog that bit you, ask for their health records. Sometimes the pet needs to be isolated so they can look for signs of rabies. If any signs show up, they will test the animal for rabies. If the animal tests positive, then you need a rabies shot.

If you were bit by a stray animal, call animal control. They will try to find the animal so they can test it for rabies. You may need to report the bite to animal control or your local health department too. Ask your doctor if you're not sure.

Source: American Academy of Family Physicians