

Animal Bites First Aid

The vast majority of animal bites are from domesticated animals such as dogs and cats, and after that the wide assortment of critters that can either be purchased at pet stores or are found in the wild. Contracting rabies from a domesticated dog or cat is extremely rare due to compliance with vaccinations in the United States. However in other countries, it is much more common. Individuals need to be aware of this if planning to travel abroad.

When bitten by an animal, if the skin has not been broken but only bruising has occurred, there is no concern of rabies and very little, if any concern, for wound infection. Please see first aid treatment of bruises to treat these minor injuries.

Rabies is much more prevalent in wild animals such as raccoons, skunks and foxes. It is strongly advised not to pick up or raise any such animals. In fact, the occurrence of rabies in raccoons is becoming a real concern. We are seeing a lot of rabid raccoons along the Eastern seaboard including South Carolina, Florida and even up into the New England states.

With larger dogs and even cats, one has to be concerned about foreign bodies left in the wound. It is not uncommon for teeth to break off into a bite wound. It common practice for healthcare providers to order x-rays after a dog or cat bite looking for broken teeth.

It is also important to note that approximately 20% of dog bites get infected in comparison to about 80% of cat bites. Cats have teeth which are akin to hypodermic needles. Puncture wounds have a higher incidence of infection, especially given the organisms found in a cat's mouth.

Cat Scratch is a totally different organism that can also cause infection and problems.

Consider for a moment how an animal's diet can play an important role in the rate of infection caused by an animal bite. For example, a pet iguana that bites you has very little chance of causing an infection as an iguana primarily eats vegetables. However a non-venomous pet snake which eats small mice, such as a corn or rat snake, can cause a very serious cellulitis/skin infection due to the snake's saliva—An important consideration for a healthcare provider!

Treatment for Animal Bites

As with wounds and lacerations, it is very important to irrigate, irrigate, irrigate. Wash the bite area with soap and water. Bandage/pressure dressing to stop the bleeding. If the bite area is in an extremity like a finger or hand, even the wrist area, it is important to splint the area and rapid transport. Again, if using topical antibiotics, be careful not to use topical antibiotics that contain Neomycin. As previously stated in Wounds and Lacerations, anywhere from 10-15% of the population may have an allergic reaction to Neomycin. It is therefore advisable to stay away from topical antibiotics containing Neomycin.