

Points on Pets: All bark and some bite

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q. Our city government is currently discussing specific dog breed ban legislation. This has arisen because of several serious dog attacks on children recently by mostly large breed dogs, which look like they might be partially pit bull. This issue has really divided our community and has become very emotional. Are dog bites a problem throughout the United States? Are we just more concerned in our community right now because of the recent attacks?

A. Of course any dog bite is of great concern. Although estimates vary, it is likely that between 4 million and 5 million people are bitten by dogs each year. Usually about 1 million of these people seek medical attention each year and more than 300,000 are treated in emergency rooms throughout the United States. Concern is heightened by the fact that more than half of the victims of dog bites each year are younger than 12.

It has been estimated that more than 50 percent of dog bite incidents involve family pets. Many of these go unreported each year, usually due to the owners fear that something horrible, such as confiscation or euthanasia, will be required if the bite is reported. Insurance companies disburse millions of dollars each year because of dog bites. Although it is thought by many that some breeds of dogs are more dangerous and more likely to bite than others, these speculations cannot be verified by good documentation.

However, bites by large breed dogs usually result in the most serious injuries. Likewise, bites by large breed dogs are more likely to be reported in newspapers because the injuries are more sensational. The relative frequency of bites by the more popular breeds tends to be overestimated, because there are simply more of these dogs among us.

In most communities banning certain breeds of dogs does not effectively eliminate the problem of dog bites. Dogs of all breeds occasionally bite people.

Therefore, the key to reducing the frequency of dog bites in most communities is simply educating everyone about how to control their dogs and how to behave around dogs. Educating children about how to behave around dogs is important. Enforcement of strong leash and licensing laws also helps protect the public from dog bites.

Q. Is there any benefit to feeding garlic to dogs? My wife read that feeding dogs garlic will prevent them from having fleas. I have tried to explain to her that if this were true, there would be no need for all of the many flea prevention programs advertised on television and recommended by our veterinarian.

A. I am not aware of any conclusive scientific studies that feeding garlic or attaching garlic to neck collars

prevents fleas on pets. You are correct in that if something as simple as feeding garlic to dogs and cats prevented fleas everyone would be doing it and there would be no need for the flea control and prevention products. However, flea control is not that simple. Large companies annually invest millions of dollars to develop more effective parasite prevention programs for our pets.

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