



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Animal Bites

First of all, if you have pets, it's important that they be vaccinated against rabies. Also, you should never try to make a wild animal into a pet, and you should never disturb animals while they're eating, even your own pets. In addition, teach your children not to play with stray dogs or cats, and not to touch wild animals or sick or injured animals. This could provoke them to attack.

It is also very important that you keep yourself and your children up to date on your tetanus shots. These are part of the initial Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis shots (or DTP shots) that are due five times in the first six years of life. A tetanus diphtheria booster should also be given between the ages of 11 and 16 and then every ten years thereafter. This shot is often referred to as a Td booster.

Animal bites that break the skin often cause bacterial infections. This is true for domestic animals as well as for bites received from humans. These bites can also cause tetanus if you aren't up to date on your tetanus shots. Rabies is a much more rare infection, but one that can kill you if it isn't treated. Fortunately, treatment for rabies consists of a simple injection which is nearly always effective. Rabies most often comes from wild animals, such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. However, stray animals that haven't been vaccinated may also carry rabies.

If you're bitten, scrub the area immediately with soap and water, and rinse any wounds well with running water. If you're bitten by someone's pet dog or cat, try to find out whether it has been vaccinated against rabies. Any pet that bites someone should be confined and watched for ten days to see if it develops symptoms of rabies. If you're bitten by a wild animal, call your health department to find out if that animal is a rabies carrier in your area, and whether you should be treated for rabies.

You should call your health care professional in the following five situations:

- 1.) if you're bitten by a wild animal;
- 2.) if you're bitten by a pet whose owner isn't sure whether it has been vaccinated against rabies;
- 3.) if you're bitten by a dog or cat that is acting strangely or foaming at the mouth;
- 4.) if you're bitten on the hand or face, or the bite looks like it might need stitches;
- 5.) if you develop signs of infection around the bite, such as increased swelling and pain, heat or red streaks extending from the bite, a discharge of pus, or a fever of 100 degrees or higher.



For additional health information you can trust:

- Log on to our members-only Web site at www.kaiserpermanente.org/california, then click the "Kaiser Permanente Members Only" button
- Visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center
- Check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone messages at 1-800-33 ASK ME (1-800-332-7563)

To get your free Handbook and Healthphone Directory, call 1-800-464-4000.

The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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REGIONAL HEALTH EDUCATION