



Preventing dog attacks: How to keep your pets safe



By AAMI 24 February 2020

In Australia, we heart our fur babies. According to an AAMI survey¹, 38 per cent of pet owners even admitted 'they love their pets more than family members'! So, if your pal is of the canine variety, it's worth knowing how to keep them safe from dog attacks and what to do if they're affected by one.

Website Feedback

What causes aggressive behaviour in dogs?

Aggressive behaviour in dogs is usually informed by a few things, like genetics, training and environment. Some contributors to aggressive behaviour include:

- a medical condition, particularly if a dog's in pain
- fear, or
- feeling threatened.

The way your dog relates to other dogs can even change as they age. [Melbourne-based Vet Dr Karen Davies](#) stresses that, if your dog has demonstrated aggressive or anxious behaviour, the most important thing to do is to 'seek help early. Be proactive — not reactive!' If you have any concerns about your pup, get in touch with your vet or a dog trainer and behaviour specialist.

How to identify if a dog is about to attack

There are a few signs that may indicate a dog is about to attack. 'A dog's body language will tell me what is going to happen,' said [Bente Dubnitzki, a Queensland-based dog trainer and behaviour specialist](#). She watches for:

- constant staring at another dog
- stiffness in the body or legs, or tense muscles
- whether the dog's ears, hackles, upper lip or tail is up, and
- a wide stance, where the dog has pushed their chest out.

During an attack

Remain calm and avoid eye contact with the attacking dog. As difficult as it might be, you need to keep yourself safe. This will likely mean not using your body to separate the dogs. Doing so could put you at risk of being bitten.

If you have access to a water bottle, try spraying the dogs with water. Or, try throwing a piece of clothing over them. Loud noises may also help to scare the offending dog off.

What to do after an attack

- Take the owner's details and record the time and location of the attack. If there are witnesses, you may find it useful to take their details. This info could come in handy for your local council, which is responsible for investigating dog attacks. It may also be helpful if you need to make a pet insurance claim.
- Take your dog to the vet immediately. Dogs can hide pain well, so even if you think your pup looks okay, they might be injured.
- After a dog attack, your furry friend may not be themselves. It's possible they'll demonstrate either a fight, flight or freeze response. Try to avoid sudden movements or too much contact.

How to keep your pets safe

Dog owners should be extra vigilant in warmer weather, when they and their pets may be spending more time outside. The best thing you can do is remain alert when you're out with your doggo, so you're prepared if something happens.

Karen suggested keeping 'your pet on lead at all times that you're out and about'. And if you're in an off-leash area, like a dog park, she says to 'make sure your pet returns when called, and that the other pups playing there are under the control of their owner and not showing any bad behaviour.'

Both Bente and Karen said owner education and awareness of a dog's social behaviour is crucial to keeping them safe. Bente says, 'Owner education is key to responsible dog ownership and creating well-adjusted canine citizens. If owners have no education and understanding of normal canine social behaviour, they cannot recognise what is abnormal and cannot step in early enough to prevent attacks and keep everyone safe.'

Consider pet insurance

Pet insurance could contribute to the cost of your eligible vet bills should the worst happen. AAMI, together with Petinsurance.com.au, offers two levels of Pet Insurance for dogs: Accidental Injury and Accidental Injury and Illness (both of which cover accidental injuries from dog attacks).

Be sure to [check out the conditions](#) — some things may or may not be covered, or they may be affected by a waiting period — to understand which type of insurance is right for you and your pooch.

[Discover Dog Insurance](#)

Read more:

- [A guide to Pet Insurance: Take care of your whole fur-mily](#)
- [How to travel safely with your pet in the car](#)
- [10 tips for boating with dogs](#)

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