

Bits on Animal Bites

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Two to five million animal bites occur yearly, often in children. Read more about managing animal bites & the role of antibiotics.

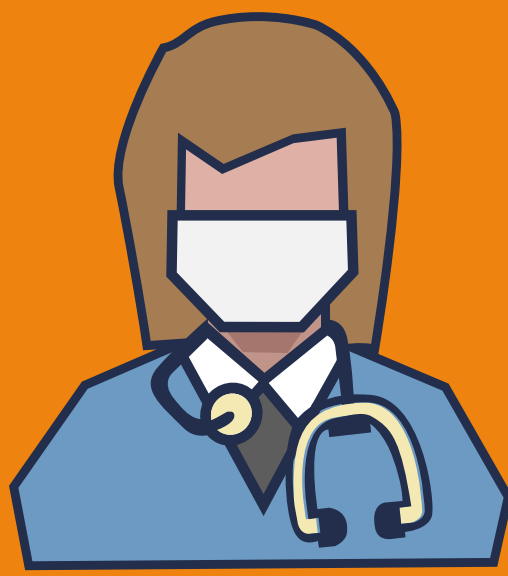
What should I do after being bitten by an animal?

- Quickly & thoroughly clean the wound with **soap and water** to help prevent infection
- If bleeding, use a clean towel or gauze to apply pressure
- Click [here](#) to learn more



When should I seek medical attention for an animal bite?

- If a **serious injury** such as bites penetrating the muscle, joint, or bone; on the face, hand, foot, or genitals; or with uncontrolled bleeding
- If **immunocompromised** from a medication or disease, do not have a functioning spleen, or have severe liver disease
- If **signs of infection** (ex. worsening pain, redness, warmth, fever, purulence)
- If concern for **rabies** (see below)



Do I need antibiotics after an animal bite?

- **3-5 days** of antibiotics may be given to **prevent infection** in **certain patients**
- Prophylaxis is usually given to patients who are immunocompromised, asplenic, or with liver disease OR for moderate to severe wounds, including on the hands, face, bone, or joint (click [here](#))
- **Antibiotic treatment** is given for longer (usually 5-10 days+) if the wound becomes **infected**

Which antibiotics are prescribed?

- **Amoxicillin-clavulanate** (Augmentin) is the first-line antibiotic for both prevention and treatment of infection in animal bite wounds (click [here](#) for dosing info)
- Trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole (Bactrim) PLUS clindamycin or doxycycline can be used for penicillin allergic patients



Do I need to receive a tetanus vaccine?

- Tetanus may be transmitted by animal bites. Patients need a **tetanus vaccine** if:
 - Their last dose was ≥ 5 years ago
 - They have received < 3 previous doses (should also receive tetanus immune globulin) (click [here](#))
 - DTaP is used in patients < 7 years; Tdap or Td is used in patients ≥ 7 years



What about rabies?

- Rabies prophylaxis isn't always needed; it depends on animal species & type of exposure. It is important to discuss with a healthcare provider
- Bites from healthy, domestic pets (i.e., dogs) usually don't require rabies prophylaxis if the animal can be observed
- Bites from bats, skunks, or raccoons usually require rabies prophylaxis (rabies vaccine + rabies immune globulin) due to a higher risk of infection
- Click [here](#) for more information



Click [here](#) to take a short quiz!



Guest author, Dinh Ho, is a Physician Assistant student at UMKC who recently graduated in May and is interested in primary care. When not studying, she enjoys spending time with her boyfriend, pet cat, Sophie, and trying new restaurants in Kansas City!