

Rates of dog bites in children up during COVID-19 pandemic

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Greater rates of Colorado's children are going to the pediatric emergency department as a result of dog bites during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a recently published commentary article in the *Journal of Pediatrics*. The article's authors, Cinnamon Dixon, DO, MPH/MSPH and Rakesh Mistry, MD/MS, who are attending physicians at Children's Hospital Colorado (Children's Colorado) and University of Colorado School of Medicine faculty, share data revealing significant increases in dog bite rates presenting to Children's Colorado since the initiation of statewide stay-at-home orders in March. Moreover, high rates of dog bite injuries have continued even as these orders have relaxed over time.

"It is well known that the number of [dog bites](#) tends to increase during the spring and summer months," said Dr. Dixon. "However this year's rates of emergency department visits due to dog bites have been startling." The incidence of visits for dog bites to Children's Colorado's emergency department in spring 2020 was nearly triple that of last year's rates at the same time.

"These findings are likely not unique to Colorado nor this institution," said Dr. Dixon. "There are approximately 82 million children and 77 million [pet dogs](#) in the U.S. who are all living in some variation of restriction. Families across the country are living under [extreme stress](#) and angst during the pandemic, and our canine friends are not immune to their human caregivers' increased anxiety. Not to mention, parents have competing priorities now more than ever, which may make them less focused on supervising their child when they are near a dog."

Factors that could be contributing to the increased rates of dog bites during the pandemic include:

- Increased child-dog exposure earlier in the year because of shelter-in-place regulations
- Heightened stress for dogs as they intuitively pick up on amplified household stress
- Decreased adult supervision around [dogs](#) and children as adults juggle increased responsibilities at home

According to the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, more than 40% of dog bite injuries resulting in emergency department visits are to children and adolescents. Children ages five to nine have the highest risk of dog bites, with infants and children at greater risk of bites to the head and neck. Most dog bites are by the family dog or another known dog.

"Dogs can be amazing companions and enrich our lives in so many ways; however it's important to remember that any dog can [bite](#) given the right circumstance," continued Dr. Dixon. "Recognizing the intense pressures and responsibilities that families are under, it is critical that parents and caregivers of children prioritize the best way to prevent dog bites—which is to always, always supervise infants and children whenever they are near a dog."

A number of additional strategies can help prevent dog bites as well, including:

—Teaching [children](#) to:

- * Never disturb a dog who is caring for puppies, eating or sleeping
- * Never reach through a fence to pet a dog
- * Never run from a dog

—Encouraging dog owners to:

- * Keep their dog healthy and ensure routine veterinary care
- * Properly train and socialize their dog

More information: Cinnamon A. Dixon et al, Dog Bites in Children Surge during Coronavirus Disease-2019: A Case for Enhanced Prevention, *The Journal of Pediatrics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2020.06.071](#)

Provided by Children's Hospital Colorado

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