



from the AVMA Press Room

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Coalition kicks off National Dog Bite Prevention Week® (April 9-15, 2017) **AVMA behavior expert demonstrates top ways to keep children and community members free from dog bites**

(Los Angeles, CA) April 6, 2017 – There are more than 77 million good dogs in the United States but even the gentlest dog can bite.

The [American Veterinary Medical Association \(AVMA\)](#), a founding sponsor of [National Dog Bite Prevention Week®](#) Coalition and coalition representatives from the [U.S. Postal Service](#), [State Farm®](#), the [Insurance Information Institute](#) (I.I.I.) and [American Humane](#), gathered today at the Weingart East Los Angeles YMCA to share the latest statistics and demonstrate safety tips with a group of Los Angeles area school children. The coalition is committed to reducing the number of dog bites and helping owners maintain the loving bond between them and their dogs.

The latest statistics show:

- Half of the 4.5 million Americans bitten by dogs annually are children 14 and younger according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#).
- 6,755 postal employees were bitten by dogs nationwide in 2016; Forty cities make up the top 30 dog bite city rankings ([chart of top 30 cities](#))
- Dog bites and other dog-related injuries accounted for more than one-third of all homeowners liability claim dollars paid out in 2016, costing in excess of \$600 million, according to the [Insurance Information Institute](#) (I.I.I.) and [State Farm®](#), the largest writer of homeowners insurance in the United States

“It is vital to teach children from a very young age how to read a dog’s behavior,” said Dr. Melissa Bain, board-certified in veterinary behavior and animal welfare and currently serves as the chief of service of the Clinical Behavior Service at the University of California–Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. “These types of interactive sessions are so important to bridge the ‘communication gap’ between children, dogs and adults. For years, we have taught children to ‘be a tree’ when approached by a strange dog. When I asked kids to ‘be a tree’ they started swaying their arms and body as if they were a tree in the wind. As a behaviorist I knew what I meant and what I anticipated how they would respond.”

Dr. Bain said it is the same with dog behavior. We can’t be certain a dog understands what our behavior says to them. We think we know how they will respond to a hug or kiss but it may actually mean something very different to them in different situations.

‘Hooch,’ top winner at the 2016 American Humane Hero Dog Awards, and his owner Zach Skow joined Dr. Mark Nample, veterinarian and Certified Animal Safety Representative for American Humane’s “No Animals Were Harmed®” program. Dr. Bain and several children joined ‘Hooch’ onstage to demonstrate bite prevention techniques.

Dr. Bain provided a few simple tips to prevent dog bites both inside and out of the home.

- Children and dogs should never be left alone together unsupervised, even if that dog is considered well behaved and kid friendly
- Socialize your pet;
- Use positive, not negative training methods;
- Learn to read your dog's body language;
- If you have concerns about your dog's behavior, visit your family veterinarian to see if your pet is in pain or has a medical condition;
- Ask about selecting a local trainer or if a referral to veterinary behaviorist is warranted.

More statistics and tips from **National Dog Bite Prevention Week Coalition members:**

- AVMA [public resources](#) include:
 - **For children:**
 - [Jimmy's Dog House](#) this video series teaches children lessons on how to be safe around dogs in everyday situations such as noises, sleeping and eating.
 - [Jimmy the Dog videos](#) teach kids what a yellow ribbon means, what to do with a lost dog, how to interact with a dog behind a fence, and what to do when the letter carrier comes to the house.
 - [Bilingual Dog Bite Prevention activity/coloring book](#)
 - **For parents:**
 - [Client Brochure: What you should know about dog bite prevention](#)
 - available in Spanish: [Prevención de Mordeduras de Perros](#))
 - [Teaching children about dog bite prevention](#)
 - [Socialization of Dogs and Cats](#)
- [American Humane](#), the country's first national humane organization, offers a free online booklet
 - ["Pet Meets Baby,"](#) with valuable information on introducing a new child to a home with a pet – or a new pet into a home with a child available for families with children.
- **State Farm®** reports that in 2016, it paid nearly \$122 million as a result of 3,660 dog-related injury claims, an increase of 15%. Responsible pet ownership and educating children about how to safely interact with dogs is key to reducing dog bites. State Farm does not exclude dog breeds or types from insurance coverage because under the right circumstances, any dog might bite.
- Dog bites (and other dog-related injuries) accounted for more than one-third of all homeowners liability claim dollars paid out in 2016, costing in excess of \$600 million, according to the [Insurance Information Institute](#) (I.I.I.) and [State Farm®](#), the largest writer of homeowners insurance in the United States. An analysis of homeowners insurance data by the I.I.I. found that the number of dog bite claims nationwide increased to 18,123 in

2016, compared to 15,352 in 2015 — an 18 percent increase. The average cost per claim for the year, however, decreased by more than 10 percent. The average cost paid out for dog bite claims nationwide was \$33,230 in 2016, compared with \$37,214 in 2015 and \$32,072 in 2014.

- The **U.S. Postal Service** reports that 6,755 letter carriers were attacked last year, an increase of 206 attacks over 2015. They ask that if a letter carrier delivers mail or packages to your front door, place your dog in a separate room and close that door before opening the front door. Dogs have been known to burst through screen doors or plate-glass windows to get at strangers. Dog owners should keep the family pet secured.

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The AVMA, founded in 1863, is one of the oldest and largest veterinary medical organizations in the world, with more than 88,000 member veterinarians worldwide engaged in a wide variety of professional activities and dedicated to the art and science of veterinary medicine.

EDITORS NOTE:

AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

Interviews with veterinary behaviorists in your community

Children videos

B-roll

Photos of events

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