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202-268-2155
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NATIONAL DOG BITE PREVENTION WEEK FOCUSES ON CHILDREN AS PRIMARY VICTIMS

WASHINGTON — Not only are children 900 times as likely as letter carriers to be attacked by dogs, half of them will be bitten by the time they turn twelve.

To raise awareness that the cure for this national epidemic is responsible pet ownership, the U.S. Postal Service is joining the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) to promote May 16-22 as National Dog Bite Prevention Week. This year's arsenal includes a courageous 12-year-old dog bite victim who actively promotes dog safety to school children.

"More than 3,400 letter carriers were attacked by dogs last year," explained U.S. Postal Service Vice President and Consumer Advocate Francia Smith, "yet that pales in comparison to the 2.8 million children who represent the majority of the 4.7 million Americans victimized by dog attacks last year."

Twelve-year-old Kelly Voigt was attacked within a month of her seventh birthday. Severe lacerations and puncture wounds inflicted by a "friendly" neighborhood dog required a plastic surgeon, nearly 100 stitches to her face and neck and two years of follow up. Her mental scars were also severe. Within a few months she was treated by a psychologist for post-traumatic stress syndrome and depression.

"Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon story," said Director of Governmental Relations for the AVMA, Dr. Michael Chaddock, DVM. "As veterinarians we realize that there are nearly 62 million good dogs in the United States. Dogs serve as wonderful companions. However, veterinarians recognize that in situations where a dog is in pain, feels threatened, or is competing for resources such as food or space, even the gentlest dog can bite," he explained. "Dog bites can seriously injure their victims and break the treasured human-animal bond through fear, abandonment, or forced euthanasia. Fortunately dog bite injuries can be prevented through responsible pet ownership and education," he said.

Kelly's psychologist suggested that she had become an expert on the subject of dog bites and could use her experience to help other children avoid similar scenarios. Soon after, Kelly and her mother Kathy met Nancy Skeffington, a school psychologist, and Casey, her Delta-certified therapy dog. Together they formed Prevent the Bite, Inc. (www.preventthebite.com) to promote dog safety to school children nationwide.

"I want to do this for the rest of my life and help other kids so that they won't be victimized like I was," Kelly said.

Her easy to remember acronym – WASP – instructs children to approach only leashed dogs accompanied by their owner.

- W – Wait and watch the dog's body language (Kelly teaches children to recognize angry, afraid and happy dogs).
- A – Ask the owner for permission to pet the animal.
- S – Let the pet sniff you.
- P – Pet the dog in the direction of his fur.

"If approached by a lone dog," Skeffington explained, "the best way to avoid aggressive behavior is to blend in with the woodwork and become boring."

"What's boring about a dog attack? Hopefully you," she said. "In most situations, keeping perfectly still results in the dog losing interest."

If knocked to the ground, curl up like a rock in the fetal position; cover your ears while cupping your fingers. If standing, act like a tree – stand still with your arms folded across your chest or down by your side and be perfectly still like a tree.

Next week, many of the nation's 38,000 Post Offices will work with the AVMA, local humane societies and other animal care organizations to provide dog bite prevention tips and remind customers about the importance of restraining their pets when letter carriers make their deliveries.

If a letter carrier feels threatened by a dog, the Postal Service will try to work with the dog's owner to ensure that the pet is restrained when the carrier makes deliveries. If the situation cannot be resolved, the owner's mail delivery could be curtailed, requiring the owner – and sometimes the neighbors – to pick up their mail at the Post Office.

If a postal employee is attacked, owners of the pet are held responsible and can be sued.

Medical expenses, workers' compensation, legal costs, delivery curtailment, carrier replacement and other costs associated with dog attacks are estimated to cost the Postal Service more than \$65 million annually.

"It's the goal of the Postal Service to deliver the mail safely and without interruption to every home and family in the nation," Smith added. "Our 350,000 letter carriers thank America's dog owners for practicing responsible pet ownership."

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. An independent federal agency, the Postal Service makes deliveries to about 141 million addresses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of more than \$68 billion, it is the world's leading provider of mail and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. Moreover, today's postage rates will remain stable until at least 2006. The U.S. Postal Service delivers more than 43 percent of the world's mail volume -- some 202 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year -- and serves seven million customers each day at its 38,000 retail locations nationwide.

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American Veterinary Medical Association Dog Bite Prevention Tips

Dog Attacks Are A Serious Health Problem

- Dog bites requiring medical attention in the United States number 500,000 to 800,000 annually. Countless more bites go unreported and untreated.
- On average, about a dozen people died each year from dog bites.

Dog Bites Can Also Result In Criminal And Civil Liability For Pet Owners

- Over the past 15 years, more than half the states have passed laws with stiff penalties for owners of dogs who cause serious injury or death.
- The Insurance Information Institute estimates that insurance companies pay out roughly \$345.5 million in dog bite liability claims.

Regardless Of Size Or Breed, All Dogs Can Bite If Provoked. Responsible Pet Ownership Is Key To Reducing The Likelihood Of A Dog Bite And Can Enhance The Owner/Dog Relationship

- There is no such thing as a bad breed of dog. All dogs can bite if provoked. Responsible dog ownership is key.
- Carefully consider your pet selection. Consult your veterinarian.

- Socialize your dog so it feels at ease around strangers and other animals. Don't put your dog in a position where it feels threatened and teased.
- Train your dog to respond to the basic commands.
- Keep your dog healthy. Have your dog vaccinated against rabies.
- Be alert to signs your dog is uncomfortable or feeling aggressive.

In Many Instances, A Dog Attack Is Avoidable. It Is Important To Remember To Say Calm If Approached By A Dog.

- Never leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- Be on the lookout for potentially dangerous situations.
- Teach young children to be careful around pets. Children should be taught not to approach strange dogs. They should ask permission from a dog's owner before petting the dog.
- Never disturb a dog that's caring for puppies, sleeping or eating.
- If a dog approaches to sniff you, stay still. In most cases, the dog will go away when it determines you are not a threat.
- If you are threatened by a dog, remain calm. Don't scream. If you say anything, speak calmly and firmly. Avoid eye contact. Try to stay still until the dog leaves, or back away slowly until the dog is out of sight. Don't turn and run.
- If you fall or are knocked to the ground, curl into a ball with your hands over your head and neck. Protect your face.

Dog Bite Prevention educational resources from the AVMA and other organizations can be found at: <http://www.avma.org/pubhlth/dogbite/default.asp> and <http://www.preventthebite.com/resources.htm>