

SOME SERIOUS PET PEEVES

We love our pets. We should not have to sustain injury or disease from them. Here are a few suggestions for sharing a world with animals.

Dog Bites Man

Each year, nearly 5 million Americans are bitten by dogs: approximately 800,000 seek medical care and twenty die (Live Safely in a Dangerous World, 2002). Knowing that:

- Stay away from a dog that looks frightened or angry.
- Do not pet a dog that is chained or alone.
- Never pet or run to a strange dog.
- Avoid running past a dog.
- Do not yell or sneak up behind a dog. Frightened dogs will bite out of fear.
- Don't disturb a dog that's sleeping, eating, or caring for puppies.
- Never grab anything away from a dog. It feels possessive about its toys, food, and bones and is willing to fight to keep them.
- Respect their territorial instincts. Dogs are protective of their owner, yard, and house.
- Ask permission before handling someone else's dog. If you receive permission, let the dog come to you. Speak quietly. If the animal is friendly, let him sniff the back of your hand to get to know you. Then stroke him under the chin.
- Always stay calm and quiet around new animals.
- Teach children to play gently with a dog. Never leave children alone with a dog.

If you encounter an angry dog

- Do not stare it in the eyes.
- Try to remain motionless until the dog moves away; then, walk away slowly, sideways. Do not turn your back on the dog.
- Be firm. Say, "No!" to the dog, and act as if you are in control of the situation.

If that fails and you are attacked by a dog

- "Feed" him your jacket, purse, or anything else.
- Curl up in a ball on the ground and protect your face.
- After the attack, report the bite and seek medical attention.

Little Tabby

The risk of infection from cat bites is high. See a doctor for antibiotic treatment. Cat scratches require careful monitoring.

Our Pets have Pests

- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling pets or cleaning up after them.
- Children can become very ill if they eat dirt or sand contaminated with infected dog or cat feces. Keep kids away from areas with possible feces. Cover sandboxes when not in use.
- To protect from infectious diseases, such as diarrhea or salmonellosis, use gloves when cleaning litter boxes or bird and reptile cages. Never wash litter boxes or cages in the sink.
- Pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems should not change cat litter; they should avoid contact with soil or sand to avoid toxoplasmosis, which is transmitted through cat feces and can cause birth defects.
- Reptiles harbor salmonella, which can be very dangerous for children under five, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems.
- When cleaning accumulated bird droppings, wear gloves and masks to prevent breathing dust. Wear gloves when cleaning a bird feeder or bath.

Follow your veterinarian's advice about examinations and vaccinations.