

# Dog Bites in the City of Alexandria

## Frequently Asked Questions

### General Questions

- **What is the definition of a dog bite?**  
A dog bite is any contact by a dog that results in broken skin, including puncture, bite or scratch.
- **Who is responsible for handling dog bites in the City of Alexandria?**  
The City of Alexandria Animal Services, which is operated by the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria, is responsible for handling all reported dog bites. Animal Services works closely with the Health Department and Attorney's office when investigating bites. **Who do I contact with questions about dog bites?**  
The City of Alexandria Animal Services is responsible for handling all reported dog bites. Contact us at 703-746-6000 or [animalservices@alexandrianimals.org](mailto:animalservices@alexandrianimals.org).
- **What if my dog attacks or is attacked by a wild animal?**  
Contact Animal Services through the APD non-emergency line at 703-746-4444, and we will respond and conduct an investigation. We will then apply appropriate quarantines and rabies testing in accordance with Virginia Department of Health (VDH) guidelines.
- **What if I am scratched or bitten by an aggressive cat?**  
Contact Animal Services through the APD non-emergency line at 703-746-4444. We will take a report and try to locate the owner to provide more information (i.e. current vaccines, health issues). If the cat appears to be a stray or feral cat, we will provide safety guidance to the person who has had interaction with the cat.

### Questions About the Dog Accused of Biting

- **Will Animal Services euthanize my dog because it bit someone or another animal?**  
The City of Alexandria addresses dog bites within its municipal code. If your dog is determined by the City Magistrate to meet the definition of a dangerous or vicious dog, you will receive a summons with a court date to testify about whether your animal should be deemed dangerous. You have the right to hire your own attorney to speak on your behalf in all court proceedings if you choose. In the City of Alexandria, most dogs who are investigated in such cases are **NOT** deemed to be dangerous.
- **My dog didn't bite anyone. Why is he being accused?**  
If you believe your dog did not bite anyone, then you can provide any evidence that you have to Animal Services. They will be reviewing evidence provided by the dog owner through an investigation and review the investigation facts with the City Attorney.
- **The bite wasn't serious. Can't this all be dropped?**  
There are two parts of a dog bite investigation: (i) rabies prevention and (ii) determining if the dog should be considered dangerous/vicious. All dogs and cats that cause a puncture or scratch that breaks a person's skin must be confined per the health code, no matter how serious the injury. To determine if the dog should be legally considered dangerous or vicious, the City Magistrate will review the evidence, including an opinion on the seriousness of the bite from the veterinarian who treated the victim dog or the medical records/photos from the human victim. Charges can be dropped or not pursued in some cases and the case will be closed out after this review process.
- **Will Animal Services take my dog because it bit someone?**  
Your dog will need to be confined and observed at home for a 10-day period, or at the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria if Animal Services determines that it cannot be confined at home. If this happens, in most cases you can pick up your dog after this confinement period unless Animal Services determines it must move proceed with a dangerous dog case. Animal Services has the authority to seize your dog if you fail to comply with guidelines set forth by the court order for the guilty conviction. You will also be charged with the violation of the dangerous dog code.
- **If my dog bit a person/animal, in what situations could he not be determined to be dangerous?**  
When a dog attacks or bites a companion dog or cat, the biting dog shall not be deemed dangerous (i) if no serious physical injury has occurred as determined by a licensed veterinarian; (ii) if both animals are owned by the same person; (iii) if such attack occurs on the property of the attacking or biting dog's owner or custodian; or (iv) for other good cause as determined by the court. No dog shall be found to be a dangerous dog as a result of biting, attacking or inflicting injury on a dog or cat while engaged with an owner or custodian as part of lawful hunting or participating in an organized, lawful dog handling event. In the City of Alexandria, most dogs who are investigated for biting are not deemed dangerous or vicious.

# Dog Bite Frequently Asked Questions (cont.)

- **How long will the bite follow-up take?**

The City of Alexandria's Animal Services will provide the owner of the suspect dog with a Quarantine Form within 10 days of the bite. The confinement period will last for 10 days from the date of incident. The City of Alexandria and Animal Services have 365 days from the date of the bite to bring charges. In most cases, Animal Services will make a determination whether or not to place charges within the 10-day confinement period.

- **Do I have to report that my dog bit a person/animal?**

Per City of Alexandria Sec. 5-7-40– the owner of any animal which bites a person in the City must inform an Animal Services officer, the Health Department or the police department of the incident.

- **My dog has been placed on home confinement and is now acting funny or is sick. What do I do?**

Any changes in behavior or physical condition must be reported to the Health Department (703-746-4910) immediately.

- **My dog was under verbal command.**

Alexandria City Code 5-7-35 requires all dogs to be under physical restraint, unless in one of the designated off-leash dog parks. If you wish to know where those parks are Animal Services can provide you with a map that indicates where those off-leash dog parks are.

- **Do I have to pay for the treatment of the bite?**

This is up to the individual; however, dog bites are considered civil matters and a civil lawsuit could be brought forward for expenses incurred by the victim(s).

- **The bite happened when I wasn't in control of my dog, he was being handled by someone else so aren't they responsible?**

The primary concern is the health and safety around the bite from your dog, so your dog will still need to undergo the 10-day confinement period and investigation as to whether he should be considered a dangerous/vicious dog. Regarding legal responsibility for the bite, dog bites are considered a civil matter and any suits will need to be brought to civil court.

- **What if there were extenuating circumstances?:**

- I had my dog on a leash when a person came up to pet him without asking.
- Someone allowed their dog to come up to my dog without asking and my dog bit.
- My dog was at a dog park when he bit another dog, but they were just playing.
- Another dog was rude to my dog when they were playing.
- My dog is a puppy and was just mouthing.
- My dog is elderly and has no teeth.

This type of incident will be addressed with an investigation and follow-up.

- **My dog has been quarantined before so does this mean he will now be deemed dangerous/vicious?**

Not necessarily. If your dog was confined before for biting but was not determined to be dangerous/vicious, then another confinement will not affect his status; however, if your dog was already determined to be dangerous and he bites again, then you could face criminal charges.

- **My dog has a current rabies vaccination and has never been in contact with a wild animal, so why does he have to be confined?**

State code 3.2-6522 requires the confinement of an animal for a determined observation period when an exposure has taken place to ensure that rabies is not present in the attacking animal.

- **Why am I being charged with a criminal offense? Why did a police officer need to come to my house to give me my court date?**

Being charged with owning dangerous dog is considered a criminal offense. The Animal Services Officer will petition for the summons for Dangerous Dog, and if awarded, Animal Services will attempt to serve the owner of the animal with a summons. If the Animal Services Officer is unable to serve the owner of the dog with the summons, they will turn the summons over to the Alexandria Police Department for them to attempt to make service.

- **I can't keep my dog. What can I do?**

If you are the owner of the dog but unable to keep him, you are able to surrender your dog to Animal Services or the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria. Animal Services will hold the dog for the remainder of the confinement period and advise the City Attorney that the dog is in our custody. When the confinement is over, the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria will make a determination on the status of the animal involved.

# Dog Bite Frequently Asked Questions (cont.)

## Questions from the Victim (Human or Canine)

- **I/My dog was bitten by a dog. Will I/my dog be treated for rabies?**  
The Health Department will be in contact with the victim/owner of the victim with guidance on rabies preventative treatment and will provide all medical advice when it comes to treatment of potential exposure.
- **How do I make the dog owner pay for my/my dog's medical care or other expenses related to the bite?**  
Animal bites are considered a civil matter. If a citizen chooses to pursue compensation for injuries, they will have to do so through civil court.
- **I/My dog was injured by a dog, but it wasn't a bite. What should I do?**  
Any injury caused by a companion animal is considered a civil matter. If you choose to pursue compensation for injuries sustained, you will have to go through civil court to do so.
- **A dog tried to attack me/my dog but I got away. What can you do?**  
It is best to report this type of incident via the APD non-emergency hotline at 703-746-4444 and ask for an Animal Services Officer to respond. The Animal Services Officer will start an investigation, obtaining as much detail on the incident as you can provide and then patrol the area or go to the residence you have provided to where the animal may be located.
- **Will the dog be euthanized if I report it?**  
Animal Services looks into each case individually and we will evaluate all the information we are given to determine the best course of action. Most dogs investigated in bite incidents are **NOT** euthanized.
- **Why the dog that bit me/my dog still allowed to take walks in public or visit the dog park and walk the dog?**  
When an animal is under confinement, we will share the Health Department guidelines with the owner of the suspect dog and they must agree to these conditions as part of the quarantine procedures. Dogs are allowed to be walked while they are under a confinement period under the direct control on a leash of the owner. They are not allowed to be in dog parks or in areas where they can mingle with other animals or potentially expose other people. If you see a dog that is undergoing confinement without a leash, please contact Animal Services immediately.
- **I/My dog was attacked by multiple dogs but I'm not sure which of them caused the injury. What should I do?**  
Report the incident to Animal Services immediately. Animal Services will investigate and under most circumstances we will quarantine all potential attacking animals since we will be unable to determine which animal caused the exposure.
- **I was bitten in the City of Alexandria by a dog that lives outside the City. Who investigates?**  
The City of Alexandria's Animal Services will investigate the initial incident and then send the information to the jurisdiction in which the animal resides for the required quarantine.
- **I was bitten in the Alexandria portion of Fairfax. Who do I contact?**  
If you live in the Alexandria part of Fairfax (including zip codes 22303 and 22306), you should contact Fairfax Animal Protection Police at 703-385-7924 to file your report.
- **I was bitten by a stray dog in the City of Alexandria.**  
Contact Animal Services immediately. Provide as much information to the Animal Services Officer as you can on the animal that bit you. Animal Services will make all attempts to locate the dog and advise the VDH of the situation. VDH will provide guidance on next medical steps. All medical facilities within the state of Virginia must report any suspected animal bites to the VDH.
- **I was bitten by a dog and the owner took off with the dog before I got their information.**  
Contact Animal Services as soon as you can. Provide as much information on the incident and parties involved to the Animal Services Officer. Animal Services will then start their investigation on the incident and provide all the information to VDH for medical advice. Animal Services may distribute fliers in the area to see if anyone knows anything about the exposing dog or owner to gain more information on the incident.

## Questions from Businesses Who Care for Dogs

- **Do I have to report a dog bite?**  
Per the City of Alexandria code Sec. 5-7-40, every physician, medical practitioner or veterinarian practicing in the City must report to an Animal Services Officer or the health department the name and address of the owner of any animal treated for bites or wounds inflicted by any other animal.
- **Do you have to tell my client that I reported that his dog bite?**  
Yes, when Animal Services starts their investigation, we will be in contact with the owner of the dog. This is all part of the requirements for confinement.
- **Am I responsible for paying for the treatment for a dog bite that happened while I was caring for the dog?**  
This is all determined by the contract you make with your customers when you agree upon services to be provided.
- **A client has a dog that I believe they cannot control and could be a threat to the public's safety. What can I do?**  
You can report this to Animal Services and allow us to speak to the owner about these concerns.