

## **BITE AND SCRATCH AVOIDANCE**

Bites and scratches are some of the most common injuries in California veterinary hospitals. Each day you are at risk of being exposed to bites and scratches that can cause painful injury and disrupt your ability to work.

To reduce bite and scratch injuries in your practice:

- Consult each animal's file to review any previous history of bite or scratch incidents before beginning exams or treatment. Make a highlighted notation on the chart or cage card warning of animals that present a safety risk or have a history of aggressive behavior. Include any special handling instructions.
- Train staff on the signs of animal aggression and emphasize the most common type of aggressive behavior observed in veterinary practices: fear based aggression.
- Know what animal restraint devices are available and keep them in good condition.
- Use protective equipment correctly when handling animals, especially those that are injured, or show signs of fear or aggression, or when performing procedures that may cause them pain.
- Use a muzzle whenever there is any doubt about whether the patient may bite.
- When assistance restraining a patient is needed, ask for help from an experienced co-worker, not from the pet owner.
- Have a doctor or senior technician personally handle or supervise high-risk pets.
- Inquire about sedation when confronted with a difficult restraint situation to effectively and safely treat the patient.
- Keep the patient out of a crowded lobby if the pet seems threatened by other animals or people. Use a secondary building entrance or exit if available in these circumstances.
- Avoid as much stress from the environment as possible. For example, when treating cats, keep doors to kennels closed to minimize the sound of barking dogs.
- Set a positive example by following your hospital's safety practices.
- Your staff should be familiar with the various forms of aggression exhibited by animal patients as well as the behavioral signs that accompany them for each type of animal.
- Apply appropriate first aid to bites and scratches and report to a supervisor immediately. Supervisors should report all bites and scratches, even those that may not appear serious, to their insurance carrier. Employees should be encouraged to seek medical attention for bites and scratches.

## **BITE AND SCRATCH AVOIDANCE SAFETY QUESTIONS**

What are the common signs of aggression demonstrated by animals seen in this practice?

Where is animal handling and restraint equipment located in this practice and how is it properly used?

What personal protective equipment is available to employees and how is it used?

How do we indicate high-risk animals in our medical files?

What is the practices policy and procedures for handling aggressive animals?

What can we do to alter the environment to reduce stress in our patients?

What are the best practices for restraint and handling of fractious animals?

What are some of the health risks associated with bites and scratches?

What procedures should an employee follow if bitten or scratched?

### **ADDITIONAL TRAINING RESOURCES**

More information about common injuries in veterinary practices can be accessed at [cvma-inline.net](http://cvma-inline.net) in the "Workplace Safety" section.

A Bite and Scratch Avoidance online self-guided training course is available to VISC Insurance Policy Holders. Contact VISC at [visc-ins.com](http://visc-ins.com) or call (888) 762-3143 for details. To access the training courses, go to <https://learning.syntrio.com/VET/login.asp?>

California Department of Public Health booklet on [Investigation, Management and Prevention of Animal Bites in California.](#)