

The Bite Scale

An Objective Assessment of the Severity of Dog Bites Based on Evaluation of Wound Pathology

Level 1. Fearful, aggressive, or obnoxious behavior but no skin-contact by teeth.

Level 2. Skin-contact by teeth but no skin-puncture. May include scratches (less than one-tenth of an inch deep) and slight bleeding.

Level 3. One to four punctures from a single bite with no puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth.

Level 4. One to four punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth. Deep bruising around the wound, or lacerations in both directions.

Level 5. Multiple-bite incident with at least two Level 4 bites, or multiple-attack incident with at least one Level 4 bite in each.

Level 6. Victim dead.

The above list concerns unpleasant behavior and so, to add perspective:

Levels 1 and 2 comprise over 95% of all dog "bites" and well over 80% of reported bites (tallied by the CDC). The dog is certainly not dangerous but much more likely to be fearful, or rambunctious and out of control. Wonderful prognosis. Quickly resolve the problem.

Level 3: The dog is not overly dangerous but much more likely to be fearful, or rambunctious and out of control. Without treatment, other Level 3 bites may follow with a slow, albeit predictable, increase in severity, especially if the dog is stressed (frightened, cornered, manhandled, etc.) Prognosis is fair to good with owner compliance. **Quickly resolve the problem.**

Levels 4: The dog has insufficient bite inhibition and is dangerous. Prognosis for resolution is very poor because of the difficulty and danger of trying to teach bite inhibition to an adult hard-biting dog and because absolute owner-compliance is rare. The dog is a Level 4 biter and is likely to inflict an equivalent amount of damage WHEN it bites again. I recommend that the dog is confined indoors and never taken onto public property. The dog is extremely reactive and stressed around (some) people and so walks would probably not be much fun for the dog anyway. Confining the dog to a fenced yard is not safe; the dog may not be able to get out but people (children) may be able to get in.

Level 5 & 6: The dog is extremely dangerous and mutilates. The prognosis is dire. The dog is simply not safe around people. I recommend euthanasia because the quality of life is so poor for dogs that have to live out their lives in solitary confinement without physical affection from people.

To add further perspective: Each year in the US, dogs kill approximately 20 people — half of them children. However, most years in the US, approximately 2000 children are killed, not by dogs though, by their parents.

Bite:Fight Ratio

An Objective Assessment of Danger of Fighting Dogs

Establish the number of full-contact fights (#Fights) plus the number of fights in which the opponent was taken to a veterinary clinic for treatment of bite wounds, i.e., fight that resulted in actual significant physical damage (#Bites).

The ratio between # Fights and # Bites indicates the level of bite inhibition and whether or not the dog is dangerous. The greater the number of fights with no damage indicates the better the dog's bite inhibition.

Most dogs clearly fall into one of two categories — Not Dangerous or Dangerous.

Not Dangerous — Many fights but no opponent admitted to a veterinary hospital for treatment. Excellent prognosis — the dog has extremely reliable bite inhibition since it has never damaged another dog in numerous fights. The dog is unlikely to damage other dogs in future fights in the near future. The dog is not dangerous. Begin rehabilitation program immediately with oodles of classical conditioning and basic training to build the dog's confidence around other dogs. Train the dog to Come, Sit and Look at the handler on cue and reliably, to quickly diffuse escalating tension with other dogs. Rehabilitate as soon as possible because the dog is obviously stressed and walks cannot be much fun for dog or owner. The vast majority (over 95%) of fighting dogs are not dangerous.

Dangerous — Few fights but most victims require veterinary treatment. Prognosis is extremely poor since the dog routinely damages other dogs when fighting and it is time-consuming, extremely difficult and potentially dangerous to try to teach adult dogs bite inhibition towards other dogs. The dog is highly likely to damage other dogs in future fights. The dog should never be taken on to public property unless muzzled. However, walks are highly likely to be stressful for both dog and owner and so, please consider that the dog would probably be more relaxed and happy just hanging out with the human family at home.

Gray Area — Most dogs are obviously "not dangerous" and a few are obviously "dangerous". However, some dogs have had several fights but have only damaged the opponent in just one or two. The prognosis is guarded. If the inflicted damage progressively worsened from fight to fight, the prognosis is not good but if damage only occurred in the first one or two fights, the prognosis is much better.