**How to Survive a Dog Attack** [Megan Stewart](https://www.survivalsullivan.com/author/megan/)

A dog attack has little in common with a dog bite. A mere dog bite can happen for all kinds of reason, and the overwhelming majority do not result in any kind of lasting disability or disfigurement.

A dog attack, a real one, on the other hand is an entirely different event. In this event, you have been selected as prey by an animal whose predatory or defensive instincts are engaged. Its purpose: to kill you or make you food.

Though dog attacks can happen any time, think of what will happen to the population of uncared-for and feral dogs when SHTF. Faithful and friendly pets left behind when their owners die or when their owners flee without them will increasingly revert to their innate instincts to survive and fend for themselves.

Even the cuddliest domestic dog is still descended from wolves. You had better prepare accordingly if you are confronted by an aggressive dog bent on attacking you.

In this article, we’ll provide you with insights and techniques to fend off a dog attack should you find yourself on the dinner menu.

**What You Need to Know**

The CDC documents just under 5 million dog bites annually in the United States. Over 800,000 of dog bite victims annually will require medical attention; nearly 400,000 of those victims are children.

Over 30 people die annually as a result of a dog bite, and [almost 10,000 end up in the hospital](https://www.dogsbite.org/dog-bite-statistics.php). Even with the laws today about leashing your dog, there are still plenty of dogs that run free no matter where you live.

Almost every rural area, and many major cities, will be home to packs of domestic dogs gone wild or true feral dogs; ones born and raised without any human guidance, companionship or cohabitation.

But it is important to know the differences inherent in dog bites, as not every one of these bites is an attack in the proper sense of the word.

The huge majority of them are “check” bites from a dog that is uncertain, scared, hurt or stressed in some way, such as by having its personal space invaded by a friendly but oblivious stranger, or being handled too roughly by an enthusiastic child.

Investigation of bites arising from incidents like this show injuries consistent with an animal not in “kill” mode. Often injuries are a single bite, delivered with the forward most teeth, and showing a wound pattern consistent with an “in and out” bite and release.

Sometimes a “corn on the cob” pattern is in evidence; similar punctures of minimal or moderate strength delivered as a short succession of rapid fire nips.

Compare these injuries with the proper maulings delivered by large dogs bent on killing: deep, ripping lacerations, flensing wounds where skin and muscle are separated from the bone by the dog’s thrashing, and specific targeting of abdominal and neck structures.

The results of such attacks may be fatal, and are almost always disfiguring or debilitating. The chances of death or debilitating injuries jump drastically when more than one dog is involved in the attack. Even a pack of two greatly increases the severity of a dog attack.

Some statistics to consider:

Since 2008, appx. 86% of all fatal dog attacks occur against pre-teenage children.

Of those fatalities, the victim was alone and without help when the attack occurred.

Of those fatalities, 67% of them resulted from a multi-dog attack.

This makes obvious sense: adolescent children and small or infirm adults are most at risk from a sustained dog attack since they lack the strength and mass to effectively defend themselves against a large, powerful dog or a pack of dogs. More statistics, covering dog attacks (including simple bites) from 1980 through 2018:

Between 1980 and 2018 there were appx. 4,500 disfiguring dog attacks on humans,

Included in those statistics are appx. 770 human deaths resulting directly from the attack.

Of those deaths, appx. 460 are attributable to Pit Bulls. Appx. 110 are attributable to Rottweilers.

Between the two breeds, they account for over 70% of the dog attack fatalities and 80% of the disfiguring wounds resulting from a dog attack.

A significant fraction of the above deaths and maimings occurred when the victim tried to save or rescue their pet from an attack by a Pit Bull or Rottweiler.

**Dangerous Dog Breeds -** Save your righteous indignation about those and any breeds: while there are plenty of gentle and cuddly companions that make up those above mentioned breeds, the statistics are undeniable and furthermore they are responsible for a massive amount of attacks on other animals (particularly smaller dogs) out of all proportion to their population size.

From a strictly practical perspective, Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, their mixes and all associated, selectively bred dogs that were selected for pain tolerance, for tenacity and for strength, agility and a commitment to killing when necessary, are inherently more likely to inflict debilitating or lethal wounds on the attack.

Now, any breed of dog, regardless of size, can be dangerous. Never assume that a dog is not a threat because of its breed or size. But there is no way around the physics of the event; a Pit Bull attack will always be more dangerous than a Pug.

A Doberman can inflict more harm, more quickly than a Dachshund. The end. Especially when dealing with a lone dog or two dogs, you’ll have to be especially wary of large breeds that can tear open a limb with a single chomp-and-shake. Take care around:

German Shepherds Pit Bulls Wolf Hybrids Doberman Pinschers Rottweilers

Presa Canarios and other standardized pit/mastiff stock Bull Mastiffs Akitas

And other large, strong working dogs.

The average dog can bring down an animal triple its weight on a lunge. That means a 50lb. dog can bring down a 150lb human. A 70lb. dog can topple a 210lb. human, and an 80lb dog. Can bring down a 240lb human. There is very little you’ll be able to do to keep your feet when a lunging canine clamps on to or tackles you.

Large dog breeds can generate bite pressures upwards of 225psi. This is entirely adequate to tear soft tissues off the human skeleton in conjunction with a thrashing motion and will even crush bones outright. Do not ever underestimate the power of large dogs, especially the most powerful breeds.

And forget running. Running is the worst conceivable move unless the dogs are far away and you can get inside a sturdy enclosure in just a few steps.

Any of the above species of dogs will handily top 25 mph on flat terrain, and many especially athletic dogs can hit 35mph. That is faster than an Olympic sprinter, so mere mortals have no chance of escaping a closing dog.

Furthermore, running will easily activate a dog’s prey drive, possibly inciting the attack if he was not already committed.

We’ll get into behavioral analysis in the following sections, and offer guidance on how best to handle an uncertain meeting, a standoff and an active attack.

Get detailed statistics [here](https://www.dogsbite.org/dog-bite-statistics-multi-year-fatality-report-2005-2017.php).

**Tips for Dealing with a Strange Dog -** Any dog that is agitated or becoming aggressive will display defensive or offensive behavior indicators. Some of these indicators overlap with the other category but many are distinctive. Learning to recognize these sometimes subtle cues and keeping your cool will go a long way to informing your response when confronted with a scary dog acting aggressively.

Defensive aggression indicators include the dog backing away, growling, a tense, dipped posture and ears being pinned or pulled back on the head. Typically dogs display defensive behavior as a sort of cue that you should leave their area as quickly as you can (but not by running!).

A dog acting defensively will often give you an opportunity to leave, and will back away from you themselves. If they do bite while remaining defensive, they will bite and let go an “in-and-out”.

A dog displaying offensive aggression is about what you’d expect: circling, snapping, lunging and actually biting, specifically bites intended to inflict maximal harm and bring down prey. If a dog switches to offensive aggression, the attack is on.

So dealing with an unknown dog contact comes down to two main branches: managing and deescalating a dog displaying defensive aggression, and surviving an attack by driving off, incapacitating or killing a dog that is showing offensive aggression. We’ll look more at offensive dog behavior in the next section.

To manage a defensive dog while you try to extricate yourself from the situation, do the following:

Stand still and stand up straight, but keep your posture neutral.

Keep your eyes on the dog at all times. If he moves, turn smoothly to keep him in view.

Eyes:

If in an open area, keep eye contact with the dog: this will show him you are confident.

In an enclosed or tight/built-up area avoid direct eye contact: the dog may interpret this as a prelude to your attack, and attack you first.

Slowly step backwards away from the dog. In a calm but firm voice try firmly telling the dog to sit or stay. A dog may have prior conditioning and training that you can capitalize on.

Limit large or rapid body movements. Keep your arms at your sides. Smoothly and slowly access any defensive weapons carried or nearby weapons of opportunity.

Do not smile; smiling can be interpreted as aggression by the dog.

A dog displaying defensive aggression presents a person with two opportunities. The first, the opportunity to handle the situation appropriately, in which case the reward is the dog leaving or you being allowed to leave without being attacked.

The second is an opportunity to ready your weapons and think quickly to create a strategy for surviving a forthcoming attack.

**If a Dog Attack is Inevitable -** A dog that goes on the attack is exhibiting offensive aggression. If your attempts to calm or escape from the dog are not working and the dog decides to attack you, then you will need to be defend yourself as escape from a closing dog is likely impossible before it contacts you. This is easier said than done.

As in all forms of self-defense, weapons help. Many of the weapons you carry for defense against humans can and will work well on a dog. Pistols, knives, pepper sprays and clubs are all options among purpose made weapons.

Other improvised tools can be sticks, tool handles, golf clubs, baseball bats, backpacks, purses, trashcan lids, and any object that you can entice the dog to bite, or that you can put between you and the dog as a shield.

In an attack, a dog will bite just about anything that in range. An outstretched limb that is attempting to fend off the dog is often the first body part bitten unless the dog is specially trained.

After bringing you to the ground, the dog will often transition to more valuable targets like the face, neck and abdomen. We can use this compulsion against them by offering either a “sacrificial” arm or an object.

Dogs biting on the attack will initially clamp, not let go and then shake to tear flesh from the target. Land sharks indeed…

There are two concepts important to dealing with dogs on the offensive; they are the “bite stick” and the “break stick”. A bite stick is any object offered to the dog to bite, enabling us to counterattack without injury.

A break stick is any tool, often slender and tapering, used to insert between a dog’s teeth to break his hold when he has clamped down on something.

You should employ the first to decoy his initial attack, and use the second to help save someone else from a dog attack, as you will likely not be able to do so to help yourself.

Some stats to chew on about defensive weapons for stopping dog attacks:

**Firearms**: About 80% effective at stopping an attack. You must have time and opportunity to draw the gun, and compared to attacks from other humans there is a statistically higher chance of hitting a bystander when shooting to defend yourself from a dog. Also, a charging, leaping dog is not an easy target.

**Knives**: Effective, but statistically low likelihood of stopping a dog attack, and you are very likely to wound yourself in the fracas. Large dogs bred for aggression and baiting will not be deterred by anything short of hideous trauma. To employ a knife effectively you must be fluent on canine anatomy and likely risk a bite to deliver your own effective attacks.

**Club**: Statistically ineffective at stopping an attack as most people lack the power and coordination to bring a blunt weapon to bear on a moving dog effectively. But, clubs of all kinds are excellent for using as bite sticks; the sacrificial tool offered to a dog intent on biting.

**Defensive Sprays**: Generally effective on dogs, and afford you some reach, along with not having to touch the dog. Pepper spray has about the same failure rate as it does with humans, meaning that anywhere from 10-30% of the time the dog will not be deterred by the spicy blast. At any rate, an excellent option. Included in this category are fire extinguishers, whose choking chemicals and loud hissing are surprisingly effective at deterring dog attacks.

Any of the above weapons will only work if you have time to deploy them! Considering the speed of any dog, if you are charged unawares by an aggressive dog you likely will not have time to get it in gear, and accessing any tool large or small while a powerful, angry canine is treating you like a chew-toy is far more difficult than it seems.

If you have no tool on you or within reach, wrap your non-dominant arm with a jacket or shirt to help protect it and offer your forearm to the dog. Alternately you can use a purse or backpack as a shield and do the same thing. When the dog bites, you must keep your head about you!

Never pull or yank your arm away from a dog that has bitten down on you! This exacerbates the damage you receive and unless the dog is letting go anyway you will not free your arm.

Instead, drive in to the dog’s mouth, and use your momentum to gain the advantage as you go to the ground. If you can get the dog on his back you will have gone a long way to winning the fight.

Try to pin the dog on his back or his belly, and then access a lethal weapon to kill him. If the dog will not let go of your arm, take care that you do not further wound yourself with a knife or a gun.

If he does let go, take control of the dog’s head at all costs. Dog’s are flexible and can “turn in” quite sharply to get a bite; you’ll need to protect your groin and throat.

**Targeting -** Most handguns will easily penetrate the thorax of a dog, and all but smaller calibers can pierce the frontal glacis of the skull. Ideal shot placement on a dog is a theoretical exercise since you will not be shooting a standing dog broadside, quartered or head-on as with a deer shot from ambush.

Your best bets are just behind and below the shoulder from the side, down through the top of the skull, through the side of the skull behind the eyes, and into the chest from the front or side.

A dog’s chest is well protected by bone, and lesser injuries to the abdomen or limbs from a knife are surprisingly ineffective when a dog is in “offensive” mode.

In the above scenario where you are able to gain advantage over the dog, an ear-to-ear slash on the ventral surface of the neck is the way to go and will result in nearly immediate incapacitation if major vessels are severed. Be warned, this requires some force and a very sharp knife.

Aside from those targets, you can try to go in through the notch at the top of the dog’s chest where the neck meets the trunk, or laterally at an angle behind the shoulders or ahead of the hips.

Both sets of locations present fair chances to sever major vessels. Rapid “sewing machine” stabs are not as effective against a dog as you might think if they are not directed to high-payoff locations.

Using a club, you can apply a frontal or rear bar choke that can quickly incapacitate a dog or break the neck, but this also comes with the risk a dog may pop out of the hold.

Depending on how confident you are in the strength of your hands and arms, you can also try to strangle the dog in an attempt to cut off blood flow to the brain. If you choose to try this, do not let up until well after you are positive the dog is dead or it could revive and continue attacking you.

If possible, try to avoid ending up on the ground with the dog. You have the advantage while you remain standing if only because the dog cannot easily reach your face and neck.

If you do end up on the ground, you must balance your defense of your abdomen, neck and head against going on the offense to disable or kill the dog. You cannot count on the cavalry coming! The longer you allow the dog to bite you the worse your wounds will be.

**Dogs in a Pack - *You must make every attempt to detect and avoid packs of unknown or aggressive dogs at all costs!***

A pack of aggressive dogs is an order of magnitude more dangerous than a lone dog. Barring access to a firearm or large can of pepper or bear spray, you will only have the ability to engage one dog at a time, and you will be vulnerable to side and rear attacks from the others.

If you are brought to the ground, you can sustain multiple severe wounds in very short order with no ability to defend yourself.

Dogs in a pack are absolutely more dangerous and aggressive than a lone dog. You will need to have some different strategies since effectively disabling or driving off multiple dogs is far from a sure thing.

Look for a place that is high ground, such as a parked vehicle, low tree branch, or the roof of a low shed. Any place that makes it difficult for the dogs to reach you is advantageous. Anything you take shelter in is even better.

Typically, a wild or feral dog by itself will shy away from humans; they are simply looking for food. But any packs that roam together will exhibit much of the behavior of wild wolves, including group tactics, rendezvous points, and a pecking order when it comes to attack behavior, with less dominant or confident dogs circling or flanking.

Packs of dogs become even more dangerous in a SHTF scenario, the prey they normally would feast on will be dwindling due to hungry humans hunting in large numbers.

Never forger dogs can run faster than you. If you detect a group of dogs and your escape chances are anything less than 100%, pull your weapon and make ready as soon as you become aware of them. An average dog can close and bite from 40 yards faster than most people can draw their weapon!

Whenever possible, travel in a group and make sure each person is armed and prepared to fight if a pack of dogs attacks. Try to identify the alpha dog in the pack and target him first. This will send a strong message to the rest of the pack and may be enough to send them running.

**Additional Tips -** If the pack of dogs has its eye on food either from your stockpile or prey that has run through your area, do not get between the dogs and the food.

Screaming and high-pitched noises are interpreted as prey behavior.

Yawning and blinking slowly is interpreted as sign of calmness by dogs.

Raising your arms or shooing at the dogs will be interpreted as aggression.

Children and elderly can be seen as the weaker members of a group and may be targeted by a pack so keep them in the center of your group or get them to safety first; anything that looks like prey is prey to aggressive dogs.

**Prevention is Key -** Regardless of the type of dog, the best method for surviving an attack is prevention.

Your best method of prevention is to remain vigilant for stray, wild and feral dogs, especially known sightings of groups of dogs. If you detect them first, you have the advantage.

Keep your ears tuned for any barking, whimpering, yipping and growling, as well as screams of pain from humans or animals that indicate a subsequent dog attack.

In a post-SHTF scenario, try to avoid places where you have seen wild or feral dogs.

Stay close to camp or inside your home once darkness closes in. and avoid going out at night if you can help it as that’s when feral dogs are more likely to be out.

Dogs have superior eyesight in darkness and vastly superior senses of smell, which is their primary hunting sense. Avoid any areas where trash has accumulated or is being stored.

It is possible to survive a dog attack if you stay alert and follow the precautions outlined for you above. Above all, stay calm, don’t scream, and signal for help if you can do so safely.

If possible back away slowly until the dog no longer seems interested or until you can get inside or get on top of a vehicle or into a tree. If an attack seems inevitable, do what you can to minimize your injuries and prepare to fight the dogs with whatever resources you have.

The trick is learning to recognize don “language” that communicates their status- defensive or offensive- and be ready to make the switch to fight-for-your-life as soon as it appears the dog is escalating from defense to offense.

It is a touchy thing: the wrong reaction, or the right reaction done too enthusiastically or rapidly, might spur a dog on defense into going offensive. It is possible that the right reaction to a dog going offensive may “short circuit” him and give him pause or even halt the attack.

Unfortunately that is often not the case and too late to risk trying if you cannot back a dog down or back off yourself without a fight or bite. It is imperative that you are ready to act in defense at the drop of a hat when a dog moves to fight!

**Dogs and Bugging Out -** Your dog can be a very important part of your survival group if you need to bug out following a SHTF or other disaster. In most cases, you will prepare a BOB for your dog which will either be carried by him or by you depending on the size and stamina level of your dog.

[Your dog’s BOB](https://www.survivalsullivan.com/best-bags-backpacks-and-pouches-for-survival/) should include enough food and water to feed him for several days, a strong nylon leash and collar, and a pet first aid kit. Before deciding to take your pet with you when you bug out, carefully consider any possible consequences.

Make sure you are certain that you can keep your dog under control during a bug out situation. This may be especially difficult if you are bugging out in an urban situation, where there will be more people and an increased number of other dogs and animals around.

You will need to be certain that your dog will not attack unless you order them to. If you aren’t certain of this, you may want to consider muzzling your dog while traveling.

Keep in mind that in an urban situation, there may also be broken glass and other debris littering the ground that could be dangerous to your dog.

Even if you don’t own a dog or are not planning to take your dog with you when you bug out, you need to be on alert for aggressive dogs in the area. The number of dogs in an urban area will be especially high.

Dogs left behind or whose owners have died will be scared, confused, and hungry. They will be even more aggressive than when times are normal.