

What to do in a dog attack, and why they hate postal workers so much

May 2 2022, by Susan Hazel and Petra Edwards



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Australia Post workers are suffering more dog attacks than before with [1,170 incidents](#) so far this financial year—up 400 on the same time in 2021.

The delivery service says around five employees are attacked each work

day, [causing](#) serious injuries and lasting emotional trauma.

What emergency steps should you take if you witness a dog attack? And what should you do if that dog is attacking you?

When dogs attack

While the news from Australia Post is distressing, it's important to remember that the majority of the millions of dogs in Australia don't bite. For the dogs that do attack, it's usually because they are [acting on fear or anxiety](#) rather than aggression.

In the centuries since we first domesticated and trained dogs to be our pets and companions, we've shaped their natural behavior so they can share our lives, homes and environment. But we can't breed or train out all of a dog's natural instincts: many will protect their space—and will escalate their response if they feel threatened.

We don't have good national statistics on [dog bites](#). The Australian Companion Animal Council has [estimated](#) more than 100,000 people in Australia are attacked by dogs each year, with around 12,000–14,000 of them requiring medical treatment for injuries, and around 10% of those hospitalized.

In the United Kingdom, dog attacks are [increasing in adults](#) rather than kids, though the reasons for this are unclear.

UK researchers have [found](#) 80% of occupational bites occurred during [mail delivery](#), vet or kennel work, or caring for people who have dogs. In high-risk settings, specialist equipment like an air blaster might be used during an attack. But the [general public](#) (and postal workers) don't have access to these.

Three things to do if someone else is being attacked by a dog

Many people picture specific dog breeds as aggressive and more likely to attack, but this is an unhelpful stereotype. The truth is, [any type of dog can bite](#). Here's what to do:

- keep yourself safe. If you intervene, you might get bitten
- distract the dog (call out from a [safe distance](#), beep your car horn, spray the animal with a hose if there's one handy and it's safe to do so)
- call for emergency medical care if necessary.

There are also two important things to do after a dog attack:

1. provide medical attention. Every dog bite will need medical attention, to treat injury and to prevent infection
2. report it. Most local councils also require every dog attack be [reported](#). [Local authorities](#) may collect evidence, interview witnesses and follow up. They might impose a [dangerous dog order](#) or tell the owner to install or repair fencing. Roaming dogs can also be [reported](#) and picked up by authorities.

What if the dog is attacking you?

If you see a dog that looks agitated and is running towards you, the most important thing is not to react or scream. Stay calm and avoid eye contact. Move away (out of their space) as calmly and slowly as possible.

If a dog is attacking in full flight, best to stay upright, remain still and call for help. If you have time, placing something between you and them (a clipboard, jacket, wheelie bin) can help. If you end up on the ground,

curl up into a ball as tightly as possible.

Most dogs have good "[bite inhibition](#)." If a dog is really scared and an approaching person doesn't recognize the signs, they will likely bite once as a warning or reaction, but they won't necessarily keep biting if you can move away.

Why do they hate postal workers so much?

Dogs don't hate postal workers specifically, but many dogs love to chase. Some may chase postal workers on bikes then get overexcited and bite by accident in an overstimulated state. Other dogs may not appreciate strangers entering their space unannounced, and the unpredictability of visits can make things tough too.

Postal workers might consider taking dog treats on their rounds and throw them each time they visit properties with dogs. This can create a [positive association](#) with their daily visit (or sometimes, throwing a handful of treats to distract an approaching dog can help buy time to back away). They could also carry a map and make note of properties with problem dogs, so they can be prepared or owners notified to make arrangements for delivery days.

Many attacks are preventable. In the UK, where postal workers often [get bitten when they reach](#) into private mailboxes that are open on the other side, they sometimes use [long pegs](#) to push through mail. In the United States, [paw stickers](#) have been used to warn postal workers of a dog in the area.

Australia Post [recommends](#) keeping your dog in a separate room, on a leash or distracting them with a toy or treat when the [postal workers](#) arrives. They suggest not letting children answer the door in case dogs push their way past. If dogs are outside, they should be kept securely

away from the letterbox.

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