



Société pour la prévention
de la cruauté envers les animaux



Community action plan for a kinder, safer community

Au service des animaux du Québec depuis 1869



AN EVIDENCE-BASED COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN FOR A SAFER AND KINDER COMMUNITY

Introduction:

The Montreal SPCA recognizes that canine aggression represents a serious threat to public safety and must be addressed in order to ensure for safe communities in which humans and dogs co-exist and enrich each other's lives.

The Montreal SPCA believes that the most effective way to tackle this issue is for humane societies, municipalities, and experts in canine behavior and health to work together on multi-faceted strategies that target dangerous dogs of all breeds, with a strong emphasis on prevention. These strategies must focus on the underlying factors that lead to canine aggression, owner responsibility, and remedial measures to deal with aggressive dogs based on their actual behavior.

Below is a summary of the Montreal SPCA's recommendations on how to address the problem of dog bites based on a large body of scientific literature produced by experts in this field such as the *Ordre des Médecins Vétérinaires du Québec* (OMVQ), the *Canadian Veterinary Medical Association* (CVMA) and the *American Veterinary Medical Association* (AVMA).

SHORT TERM ACTIONS

(1) Properly enforce existing legislation

Most communities currently have legislation that, if properly enforced, would reduce the risk of dog bites. For example, every municipality has laws requiring that dogs be licenced and kept on leash. This is a good starting point given that over 70% of all reported dog bite incidents are attributed to off-leash, free roaming dogs and that unlicensed dogs are significantly over-represented in dog bite statistics. Yet, in many municipalities across the province, little, if any, resources are put into actually applying such laws. In many communities there is not even a single employee mandated to enforce existing animal care and control by-laws, and in the city of Montreal, where dogs are required to be licensed, less than 14 % actually are.

The Montreal SPCA recommends that communities invest resources in the enforcement of **legislation already in place that, if properly applied, would significantly reduce the risk of dog bites**, including by hiring and training personnel specifically dedicated to the enforcement of this legislation.

For more information on the enforcement of animal care and control by-laws see:

- [The National Animal Control Association's website](#)
- [Animal Control Management: A Guide for local government](#)
- [National Canine Research Council: Humane Custody, Care and Control](#)



(2) Adopt new by-laws with a focus on dog bite prevention and responsible dog ownership

Experts agree, and studies confirm, that legislation that focuses on responsible dog ownership and humane care of animals is critical in reducing the risk and severity of dog bites. Neglected, abused, and poorly socialized dogs are responsible for the majority of dog bites. Permanently chained dogs are three times more likely to attack than dogs who are not chained. Unsterilized male dogs are involved in approximately 75% of reported dog bites. Requiring dog owners to act responsibly and to provide proper housing, care, and socialization to their dogs prevents dogs from becoming aggressive in the first place. For example, after adopting state-wide legislation with a strong emphasis on dog bite prevention and responsible dog ownership, the state of Nevada succeeded in reducing the incidence of dog bites by 15%.

The Montreal SPCA recommends that communities adopt animal care and control legislation with an emphasis on responsible dog ownership and humane care of animals in order to prevent dogs from becoming aggressive in the first place. This legislation should:

- Regulate the breeding and sale of animals in order to prevent aggressive dogs from being bred and sold
- Require that all dogs, particularly puppies, be properly socialized
- Prohibit the permanent chaining of dogs
- Require that all dogs receive appropriate care, handling, and training

For more information on effective legislation of this type, including model and currently existing by-laws, see:

- [The Montreal SPCA's recommendations on developing an evidence-based dangerous dog by-law](#)
- The Montreal SPCA's and [Model animal care and control by-law](#) (French only)
- The animal by-laws of the cities of [Beaconsfield](#), [Calgary](#), [Hudson](#), and [Sherbrooke](#) (French only)
- [American Veterinary Medical Association's Task Force on Canine Aggression: A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention](#)
- The National Companion Animal Coalition's [Model by-law](#)

(3) Adopt breed neutral legislation and procedures to deal with dogs who bite or display aggression:

Many communities do not have clear legislation or protocols to handle cases involving dog bites or other forms of canine aggression. It is often unclear what agency or department the information should be reported to, what information should be included, or who has the authority or expertise to determine that a dog is, in fact, 'dangerous'. Consequently, dogs who have bitten or displayed aggressive behaviour may not be properly monitored, and are at high risk to bite again. Another consequence of unclear reporting procedures is that statistics in relation to dog bites are not properly recorded.

The Montreal SPCA recommends that communities adopt legislation which includes:

- A well defined procedure for reporting and investigating dog bite related incidents



- A clear definition of 'dangerousness' that focuses on a dog's behavior - not on physical characteristics - and refers to the opinion of a canine behavioural expert
- Strict penalties for owners who fail to comply with mandatory standards of care for dogs or whose dog is deemed dangerous, including possible prohibitions on animal ownership

For additional information on these types of measures, see:

- [The Montreal SPCA's recommendations on developing an evidence-based dangerous dog by-law](#)
- The Montreal SPCA's and [Model animal care and control by-law](#) (French only)
- [American Veterinary Medical Association's Task Force on Canine Aggression: A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention](#)
- [The National Animal Care Control Association's guidelines on dangerous dog legislation](#)

LONG TERM ACTIONS

(4) Implement and fund community programs that enable all pet owners to care for their animals responsibly

Experts agree that programs that help underprivileged families properly care for their animals must be in place in order to achieve widespread compliance with animal care and control by-laws. Studies show that such programs, coupled with properly enforced legislation, result in a reduction in the risk and severity of dog bites. For example, the city of Calgary achieved an unparalleled level of compliance with its municipal by-law and a reduction of dog bites by 50% after adopting a responsible pet ownership model which included funded community programs. Such programs help all pet owners act responsibly and ensure dogs are well cared for and sterilized, thereby targeting some of the primary risk factors for the development of canine aggression.

The Montreal SPCA recommends that communities create and fund programs aimed towards helping all pet owners comply with legislation and care for their animals responsibly, including:

- Low cost spay/neuter services for low income families
- Door to door outreach in under-served communities
- Development and distribution of educational materials, in multiple languages, regarding responsible pet ownership, appropriate standards of care and existing animal care and control by-laws

For examples of existing programs of this type, see:

- The National Canine Research Council's [Support, inform then enforce handout](#)
- The Humane Society of the United States' [Pets for Life Program](#)
- Hello Bully's [Pittsburg Pets](#)

(5) Develop and fund public education programs

Public education, especially programs targeting children, is a key component of any dog bite prevention program. Children's natural behaviors, including running, grabbing,



hitting, yelling, and quick darting movement, put them at a high risk for dog bites. Providing children with just one hour of dog safety training in the second and third grades has been proven to reduce dog bites by over 80%.

The Montreal SPCA recommends that communities develop and fund education programs which include:

- Teaching children and their parents how children should interact with dogs
- Teaching the general public about dog behavior, how to recognize signs of aggression, and how to react when confronted with an aggressive dog in order to mitigate the risk of injury
- Teaching pet owners about proper dog care, handling, and training

For more information on dog bite prevention educational programs, see:

- [American Veterinary Medical Association's Task Force on Canine Aggression: A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention](#)
- The American Veterinary Behavioral Association's [Position on Breed Specific Legislation](#)
- The American Veterinary Medical Association's [Teaching Children how to Prevent Dog Bites](#)