



WORLD VETERINARY
ASSOCIATION

WVA/24/PS/Rev. 2024

PRESIDENT

Dr Rafael Laguens

PRESIDENT ELECT

Dr John de Jong

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Dr Patricia Turner

COUNCILLORS FOR AFRICA

Dr James Ouma

Dr Cynthia Charlotte Nkuna

COUNCILLORS FOR AMERICA (NORTH)

Dr Enid Stiles

Dr Shannon Mesenhowski

COUNCILLOR FOR AMERICA (LATIN)

Dr Arturo Carlos Mejorada Porras

Dr Helio Blume

COUNCILLOR FOR ASIA and OCEANIA

Dr Chou Chin-Cheng

Dr Ganokon Urkasemsin

COUNCILLOR FOR EUROPE

Dr Heidi Kellokoski-Kiiskinen

Dr Slaven Grbić

**COUNCILLOR FOR MIDDLE EAST and
NORTH AFRICA**

Dr Roula Shaaban

Dr Salah Al-Shami

**COUNCILLOR FOR INTERNATIONAL
REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Dr Olatunji Nasir

**COUNCILLOR FOR INTERNATIONAL
DISCIPLINE-CENTRED ORGANIZATIONS**

Dr Wanyong (William) Pang

WORLD VETERINARY
ASSOCIATION (AISBL)

Rue Washington 40
1050 Brussels, Belgium

E secretariat@worldvet.org

www.worldvet.org

Position Statement on Control of Inappropriately Aggressive Dogs

WVA POSITION

The World Veterinary Association recognizes that inappropriately aggressive dogs may pose a significant threat to humans and other animals. The WVA believes that raising awareness and education within communities are the most effective means of preventing and controlling inappropriately aggressive dogs. Veterinarians can assist by educating owners on responsible dog ownership in order to directly reduce aggression. WVA supports legislation by local or regional governments about responsible ownership and how that applies to those owning aggressive dogs, providing that it does not refer to a specific breed.

Recommendations:

EDUCATION

Education of dog owners is the most important action leading to a reduction in aggressive dogs. Veterinarians can assist the public with correct advice on choosing the type of dog most suited to the particular needs of the prospective owner. Early socialization of puppies with humans and other dogs and on-going obedience training are also highly effective. Veterinarians are encouraged to take the initiative in cases where puppies are displaying inappropriate aggressive behavior as early intervention is key to an improved outcome and reducing risk. When identifying inappropriate aggressive behaviors in any dog, the veterinarian should educate the owner on the issue and communicate possible treatment recommendations. The treatment plan should include management and prevention as well as training, behavior modification, and pharmaceutical therapy where necessary. When and where possible, a behavioral referral to a veterinary behavioral specialist may be necessary to work with early or ongoing problems.

It is critically important for veterinarians to ensure dog breeders and owners understand the causes of inappropriate aggression in dogs, such as genetic/hereditary factors, environmental factors and medical conditions/diseases.

OWNER RESPONSIBILITY

Dog owners have a responsibility to train their dogs using acceptable techniques, as well as employing appropriate and humane methods of restraint for their dogs to ensure public safety. Dog bites are significantly reduced when animals are not permitted to roam unsupervised. Permanent identification should be encouraged to ensure that dogs can be traced back to their owner in the event that a dog shows inappropriate aggression to a person or another animal. Dog owners who engage in criminal activities sometimes keep large, dangerous dogs for purposes such as dog fighting, acts of revenge, or protection against those wanting to deter their activities. Breeding and keeping of such dogs is not appropriate.

LEGISLATION

To attempt to control inappropriately aggressive dogs, different countries have implemented various legislative strategies. Legislation and regulations should provide sufficiently robust mechanisms to deal with irresponsible owners and inappropriately aggressive dogs.

Although some countries have adopted anti-breed-specific legislation, there is no evidence to suggest that these types of regulations are effective. Breed-specific legislation has been shown to be difficult to apply, due to issues related to accurately defining and identifying breeds and breed types. No criteria have been identified to determine which dogs will become dangerous based on breed or various physical parameters. As well, legislation banning certain dog breeds engenders a false and dangerous perception that dog breeds not listed will not be inappropriately aggressive.

When legislation is developed to provide protection against inappropriately aggressive dogs, it should consider:

- Public movement restrictions for these dogs and use of humane muzzles.
- Animal behavior modification/training of dogs and dog owners.
- Re-location of the inappropriately aggressive dog to an environment in which their behavior does not pose a threat to humans or other animals.
- Disqualification of owners of dangerous dogs from future dog ownership.
- Confiscation of dogs with inappropriate aggression from owners who are unwilling or unable to control the animals. These animals should be turned over to a legitimate organization for assessment, retraining or euthanasia, as deemed appropriate, by a qualified veterinarian.
- Designation of any identified vicious dog as being unfit for adoption.

BACKGROUND

Aggression is part of the normal repertoire of the dog, but there are times when it is not considered appropriate and may even be dangerous for those to whom it is directed.

Appropriate aggression is a normal behavior that can be exhibited when a dog perceives significant danger or threat. Such aggression can also be seen in the context of normal communication between dogs, as well as dog-human communication. Dogs that show normal aggressive behavior will exhibit **a complete behavioral sequence**, which includes:

- **warning** (growling, lip lifting, barking),
- **pause** to observe the other individual's response,
- **action** (lunge or bite if the dog has interpreted the situation or person as dangerous) and
- **release**

If the dog does not interpret the situation or person as dangerous, is reassured or "in agreement" with the individual's response to the warning, it could choose to end the behavioral sequence after the warning, without further action.

Inappropriate aggression consists of an altered behavior sequence (e.g., no warning prior to the bite; no release of the bite; warning and bite without a pause between the two events, etc.).

Other indications of inappropriate aggressive behavior include:

- the aggressive behavior cannot be justified or explained given the circumstances (e.g., inappropriate for the context, unrelated to self-defense, or because of pain or threat to the animal),
- the frequency of aggressive events is excessive for the context,
- the severity of the bite is excessive for the context.

Resources

- Reisner, I., Schwartz, S. (2014). Aggression unleashed: Do dogs mean to be mean? In: D.F. Horwitz and J. Ciribassi, eds., *Decoding Your Dog*, New York: Mariner Books, pp.199-234
- Landsberg, G.M., Denenberg, S. (May 2014, revised Oct 2022). *Behavioral Problems of Dogs*. Accessed: <https://www.merckvetmanual.com/behavior/normal-social-behavior-and-behavioral-problems-of-domestic-animals/behavioral-problems-of-dogs>