

Animal Bites During Pregnancy: What Should You Do?

Pregnancy comes with plenty of surprises but getting bitten by a nonvenomous animal like a dog, cat, or squirrel is not on the top of the list.

The good news is that most animal bites can be managed safely during pregnancy. Knowing what to be concerned about can help protect both you and your developing baby.

When Are Animal Bites a Concern in Pregnancy?

Most concerns after an animal bite are related to the possibility of an infection.

Animals have bacteria in their mouths, and even a small bite can sometimes lead to an infection. Signs to watch for include:

- Increasing redness around the bite
- Swelling
- Warmth around the wound
- Pus or drainage
- Fever
- Worsening pain

If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your healthcare provider right away.

Some bites, especially cat bites, have a higher chance of becoming infected because cats' teeth can push bacteria deep under the skin.

If your healthcare provider believes there is a significant infection risk, they may recommend antibiotics. MotherToBaby has a podcast on antibiotics if you would like to know more: [Antibiotics – MotherToBaby](#)

What About Rabies?

Rabies is a viral infection that affects the nervous system (the brain, spinal cord, and nerves). In the United States, rabies is uncommon in people, however, it can be transmitted through bites from animals who have rabies. A healthcare provider may consider rabies prevention treatment if you are bitten by a:

- bat
- raccoon
- skunk
- fox
- stray animal
- or any animal acting unusually interested in biting humans or appearing sick

One question MotherToBaby specialists sometimes hear is: “Can I still get rabies shots while pregnant?”

Rabies shots have been studied for use in pregnancy and have not been known to increase risks for birth defects or cause other negative pregnancy problems. The deadly outcomes of untreated rabies can be avoided with appropriate treatment. Your healthcare team can help determine whether treatment is needed based on the type of animal and circumstances of the bite. If you are ever concerned about rabies exposure, always reach out to your healthcare provider right away.

Do Not Forget About Tetanus

Animal bites could also introduce bacteria that cause tetanus through an open wound. Tetanus is a serious illness that causes severe muscle tightness and spasms with no cure. In the United States, obtaining the Tdap or DTaP vaccines on schedule can help prevent tetanus.

If it has been a while since your last tetanus-containing vaccine, your healthcare provider may recommend a booster. Many pregnant women already receive a Tdap vaccine during pregnancy to help protect their newborn from pertussis (whooping cough), but timing and wound management recommendations can vary. Your healthcare provider can help determine what is appropriate for your situation.

What About My Pregnancy?

The primary concerns with animal bites in pregnancy are those that break the skin and could lead to an infection, or those causing harm to the abdomen. If a bite is not on the abdomen, and does not break the skin, the risks to a pregnancy are low.

Prompt wound care and medical evaluation can go a long way toward reducing risks. However, if you experience severe injury, significant blood loss, fever, or other concerning symptoms after a bite, seek medical attention immediately.

How Can I Prevent Animal Bites?

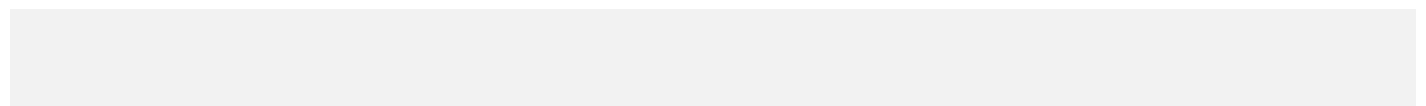
A few simple precautions can help:

- Avoid approaching unfamiliar animals.
- Never try to handle wild animals.
- Teach children to respect animals' space.
- Keep pets up to date on veterinary care and vaccinations.
- Be cautious around animals that are eating, sleeping, or caring for their young.

The Bottom Line

Most animal bites during pregnancy are more scary than dangerous. Cleaning the wound, contacting a healthcare provider, and getting prompt medical advice can help prevent complications.

If you have questions about animals, or other exposures during pregnancy or breastfeeding, MotherToBaby specialists are available to provide evidence-based information you can trust.





Sophia Bradley, MS, CGC

Genetic Counselor

Sophia Bradley is a genetic counselor and teratogen information specialist based in Houston, TX. She received her Master's Degree in Genetic Counseling from Wayne State University in 2024.

References:

- CDC Rabies Information
- CDC Animal Bites and Rabies Prevention
- ACOG Immunization During Pregnancy Guidance
- CDC Tetanus Information
- Infectious Complications of Bite Injuries. Greene SE, Fritz SA. Infectious Disease Clinics of North America. 2021;35(1):219-236. doi:10.1016/j.idc.2020.10.005.
- Bite-Related and Septic Syndromes Caused by Cats and Dogs. Oehler RL, Velez AP, Mizrachi M, Lamarche J, Gompf S. The Lancet. Infectious Diseases. 2009;9(7):439-47. doi:10.1016/S1473-3099(09)70110-0.
- In Utero Infection Due to Pasteurella Multocida in the First Trimester of Pregnancy: Case Report and Review. Waldor M, Roberts D, Kazanjian P. Clinical Infectious Diseases : An Official Publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. 1992;14(2):497-500. doi:10.1093/clinids/14.2.497.
- Capnocytophaga Species and Preterm Birth: Case Series and Review of the Literature. Lopez E, Raymond J, Patkai J, et al. Clinical Microbiology and Infection : The Official Publication of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases. 2010;16(10):1539-43. doi:10.1111/j.1469-0691.2009.03151.x.
- Chorioamnionitis Caused by Capnocytophaga: Case Report and Review. Iralu JV, Roberts D, Kazanjian PH. Clinical Infectious Diseases : An Official Publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. 1993;17(3):457-61. doi:10.1093/clinids/17.3.457.
- Capnocytophaga Zoonotic Infections: A 10-Year Retrospective Study (The French CANCAN Study). Beauruelle C, Plouzeau C, Grillon A, et al. European Journal of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases : Official Publication of the European Society of Clinical Microbiology. 2022;41(4):581-588. doi:10.1007/s10096-022-04402-x.
- Postexposure Rabies Vaccination During Pregnancy: Effect on 202 Women and Their Infants. Chutivongse S, Wilde H, Benjavongkulchai M, Chomchey P, Punthawong S. Clinical Infectious Diseases : An Official Publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. 1995;20(4):818-20. doi:10.1093/clinids/20.4.818.
- Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis: A Systematic Review on Abridged Vaccination Schedules and the Effect of Changing Administration Routes During a Single Course. Kessels J, Tarantola A, Salahuddin N, Blumberg L, Knopf

L. Vaccine. 2019;37 Suppl 1:A107-A117. doi:10.1016/j.vaccine.2019.01.041.

- **Practice Bulletin No. 151: Cytomegalovirus, Parvovirus B19, Varicella Zoster, and Toxoplasmosis in Pregnancy.** Committee on Practice Bulletins—Obstetrics. Obstetrics and Gynecology. 2015;125(6):1510-1525. doi:10.1097/01.AOG.0000466430.19823.53.
- **Committee Opinion No. 718: Update on Immunization and Pregnancy: Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis Vaccination.** Committee on Obstetric Practice. Obstetrics and Gynecology. 2017;130(3):e153-e157. doi:10.1097/AOG.0000000000002301.
- **Dog and Cat Bites: Rapid Evidence Review.** Ortiz DD, Lezcano FO. American Family Physician. 2023;108(5):501-505.
- **Sepsis in Pregnancy and the Puerperium: A Comparative Review of Major Guidelines.** Giouleka S, Boureka E, Tsakiridis I, et al. Obstetrical & Gynecological Survey. 2023;78(4):237-248. doi:10.1097/OGX.0000000000001108.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://www.MotherToBaby.org).

Disclaimer: MotherToBaby Fact Sheets are meant for general information purposes and should not replace the advice of your health care provider. MotherToBaby is a service of the non-profit Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS). Copyright by OTIS, October 15, 2026.