

# What to Do If a Dog Bites You While Cycling

## Understanding Your Rights and Responsibilities Under Washington Law

Cycling offers many benefits, from recreation and fitness to environmentally friendly transportation. Unfortunately, encounters with aggressive dogs can turn an ordinary ride into a serious emergency. When a cyclist is [attacked or bitten by a dog](#), the result can be painful injuries, property damage, and lasting emotional trauma.

In Washington, dog owners are generally responsible for injuries caused by their animals, including those that occur on roads, sidewalks, or bike trails. If you have been bitten or attacked by a dog while cycling, there are important steps you can take to protect your health, safety, and potential right to compensation.

At [The Scott Law Firm, PLLC](#), attorney Colin Scott has handled many dog bite cases throughout Vancouver and Southwest Washington. As a dog bite lawyer for cyclists, he understands both the physical impact and legal implications of these incidents.

## Immediate Steps to Take After a Dog Bite While Cycling

The first and most important step following a dog bite is to ensure your safety and seek medical attention. Even a bite that appears minor can result in [infection](#) or other serious complications if left untreated.

If a dog attacks you while riding your bicycle, consider the following actions:

### 1. Get to a safe location.

Move away from the attacking animal as soon as possible. Do not attempt to chase or confront the dog, as this could escalate the situation. Find a secure place where you can assess your injuries and call for help.

### 2. Call 911 for serious injuries.

If the attack causes significant bleeding, deep puncture wounds, or possible fractures, emergency responders can provide immediate medical care. Even minor bites that break the skin should be treated promptly to minimize the risk of infection or long-term complications.

### 3. Identify the dog and its owner.

If possible, note where the dog came from and whether the owner is present. Get the owner's name, address, and contact information, as well as the dog's vaccination history if available. Do not attempt to restrain the dog yourself.

### 4. Obtain witness information.

If anyone witnessed the incident, ask for their contact details. Witness statements can be valuable when determining how the attack occurred and whether the dog's owner may be liable.

### **5. Document the incident.**

Take photographs of your injuries, your damaged bicycle or equipment, and the location where the attack occurred. Continue taking photos of your wounds throughout the healing process, as this can help establish the full extent of your injuries.

### **6. Report the attack.**

[Report the incident](#) to your local animal control agency or the Clark County Sheriff's Office. Animal control may investigate the dog's history, verify vaccination status, and determine whether the dog should be quarantined or designated as "potentially dangerous" or "dangerous" under Washington law.

- Clark County Animal Control Services: 360-397-2488
- Clark County Sheriff's Office: 360-397-2211

### **7. Seek medical care promptly.**

Even if emergency services are not required, schedule an examination with a healthcare provider as soon as possible. Dog bites can cause bacterial infections such as *Pasteurella* or *Capnocytophaga* and may require antibiotics or a tetanus booster. Talk to your doctor and see what they recommend.

## **Reporting the Bite and Public Safety Considerations**

Reporting a dog bite is important not only for your own protection but also for community safety. Animal control agencies in Washington track dog bite incidents to identify potentially dangerous dogs and enforce vaccination requirements.

If the dog's vaccination status is unknown, animal control may issue a quarantine order or require rabies testing. [Under Washington law](#), dogs are required to be vaccinated against rabies, and owners who fail to comply may face penalties.

## **Understanding Liability for Dog Bites in Washington**

Under Washington's strict liability statute, [RCW 16.08.040](#), dog owners can be held strictly liable for injuries caused by their animals, regardless of whether the owner was negligent. The law states that:

*"The owner of any dog which shall bite any person while such person is in or on a public place or lawfully in or on a private place... shall be liable for such damages as may be suffered by the person bitten, regardless of the former viciousness of such dog or the owner's knowledge of such viciousness."*

This means that a cyclist who is bitten by a dog on a public road, trail, or sidewalk does not necessarily need to prove that the dog had previously shown aggression or that the owner acted negligently. The fact that the dog bit someone in a public area may be sufficient to establish liability.

### **Exceptions to Liability**

Although Washington's law is among the most protective for victims, there are a few exceptions that may limit an owner's responsibility. The dog owner may argue that the cyclist was trespassing or provoked the animal.

**Trespassing:** If a cyclist entered private property without permission and was bitten, the dog owner may use this evidence to defend, and potentially defeat, liability. However, if the cyclist was riding on a public street or path, this defense is unlikely to apply.

**Provocation:** If the dog's owner can prove the cyclist provoked or taunted the dog, which then caused the attack, the owner may use this evidence to defend, and potentially avoid, liability. However, unintentional or accidental movements such as riding past a dog's yard typically would not constitute provocation.

### **Insurance Coverage for Dog Bite Injuries**

Compensation for dog bite injuries often comes from homeowner's or renter's insurance policies. These policies may provide liability coverage for injuries caused by pets, even if the incident occurred away from the owner's property.

Depending on the policy, compensation may include:

- Medical expenses and rehabilitation costs
- Lost wages or time away from work
- Compensation for pain, suffering, and emotional distress
- Costs of damaged property, such as clothing or bicycle gear

If the dog's owner does not have insurance, victims may need to explore alternative options, such as pursuing a personal injury claim directly against the owner. This is why consulting a lawyer to review your potential legal options is so important.

### **Common Injuries Cyclists Suffer in Dog Attacks**

Cyclists who are bitten or attacked by dogs may sustain a combination of bite-related and crash-related injuries. Such injuries may include:

- Puncture wounds and lacerations
- Deep tissue infections
- Nerve or tendon damage
- Fractures or abrasions from falling off the bicycle

- Scarring or disfigurement
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

In some cases, a dog attack may cause a cyclist to lose control and collide with another vehicle or stationary object, resulting in additional injuries. Medical documentation of all injuries, both from the bite and from the fall, is important for any potential claim.

### **When to Contact a Dog Bite Lawyer for Cyclists**

If you were bitten or attacked by a dog while riding a bicycle in Washington, consulting with a lawyer familiar with both cycling and personal injury law can be beneficial. These cases may involve multiple insurance policies, disputed liability, or unclear ownership of the dog.

An attorney can help by:

- Investigating the incident and identifying all potentially liable parties.
- Gathering and preserving important evidence
- Communicating with insurance companies, so you don't have to, to help protect your rights.
- Evaluating your damages and determining the fair value of your claim.
- Taking appropriate legal action if a settlement cannot be reached.

At The Scott Law Firm, PLLC, [attorney Colin Scott](#) is an experienced cyclist and has represented cyclists and pedestrians injured in dog attacks throughout Vancouver and Southwest Washington. He can explain how Washington's strict liability laws may apply to your case and what steps can be taken to pursue compensation.

### **Understanding Time Limits for Filing a Dog Bite Claim**

In many cases, Washington's statute of limitations gives injured adults three years from the date of the attack to file a personal injury claim. For minors under the age of 18, the three-year period may not begin until their 18th birthday.

However, determining the exact deadline will depend on the specific facts of each case. Because time limits are critical, it is best to speak with an attorney as soon as possible to ensure your rights are preserved. If you wait too long and the applicable statute of limitations expires, your claim will be lost forever.

### **Why Legal Guidance Can Help**

Navigating medical treatment, insurance claims, and Washington's dog bite laws can be complicated, especially while recovering from physical injuries. An experienced dog bite lawyer for cyclists can help protect your rights and guide you through the process of reporting, documenting, and pursuing compensation.

Legal representation can also ensure that insurance companies treat your claim fairly and that important deadlines are met. Each case is unique, and the right approach may depend on where and how the attack occurred, who owns the dog, and extent of your injuries.

### **Talk to a Vancouver Dog Bite Lawyer Today**

If you were bitten by a dog while cycling in Vancouver or anywhere in Southwest Washington, you may have legal options for pursuing compensation. The Scott Law Firm, PLLC can review your case, explain how Washington's strict liability laws apply, and help determine whether a homeowner's or renter's insurance policy may provide coverage.

Attorney Colin Scott has extensive experience handling dog bite claims and understands the challenges cyclists face after serious injuries. To discuss your case and learn more about your rights, [contact The Scott Law Firm, PLLC today](#) for a free consultation.

### **Disclaimer**

Web content is not legal advice. Using this website does not establish an attorney-client relationship. If you have questions about a legal matter, you should consult with an attorney who is licensed to practice law in the appropriate jurisdiction and is familiar with the facts in your situation. To learn more about how The Scott Law Firm, PLLC can assist you with a personal injury related matter, contact our office today for a free consultation: (360) 718-3640.