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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **National Dog Bite Prevention Week—prevention is the best cure for dog bites**

(SCHAUMBURG, Ill.) May 15, 2009—It's estimated that 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs every year. Fortunately, most dog bites are preventable through appropriate pet selection, proper training, responsible approaches to animal control, and education of dog owners and potential victims.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has joined with the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Society for Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), the American Society for Reconstructive Microsurgery (ASRM), the American Society of Maxillofacial Surgeons (ASMS) and Prevent The Bite to celebrate National Dog Bite Prevention Week, May 17-23, 2009. Children are the most common victims of dog bites, followed by the elderly and USPS employees.

“Approximately half of the 800,000 Americans who receive medical attention for dog bites each year are children. And when a dog bites a child, the victim's small size makes the bite more likely to result in a severe injury,” says Dr. James O. Cook, AVMA president.

Most dog bite injuries in young children often occur during everyday activities interacting with familiar dogs. With the safety of children in mind, this year the AVMA is introducing The Blue Dog Parent Guide and CD, an educational

tool aimed at teaching children, 3 to 6 years old, and their parents how to avoid dog bite injuries.

“Research and professional experience tell us these incidents are largely preventable,” Dr. Cook says. “That’s why National Dog Bite Prevention Week and programs like The Blue Dog are so important. Teaching people how to communicate with and properly behave around dogs is the best cure for dog bites.”

“Pediatricians treat children with dog bites every day, and some are quite serious. These incidents can be dramatically reduced if children and parents know what to do,” says AAP president David T. Tayloe, Jr., MD, FAAP.

Dr. Cinnamon Dixon, a pediatrician specializing in pediatric emergency medicine, sees the life changing fear and trauma daily.

“There are over three times as many dog bites as traumatic brain injuries each year. Despite these statistics, a major deficiency in dog bite prevention education and research exists,” Dr. Dixon says.

Someone who knows just how traumatic dog bites can be is 17 year-old Kelly Voigt. Kelly was severely injured 10 years ago when a neighbor’s dog attacked her. She received more than 100 stitches in her face and throat and was treated for post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Unfortunately, Kelly’s injuries are not unusual.

“Children are frequently bitten on the face, which can result in severe lacerations, infection or scarring,” said ASPS President John Canady, MD. “Plastic surgeons, who have the training to preserve and rearrange skin and tissue, performed

more than 16,000 reconstructive surgeries after dog bites last year. Following these dog bite prevention tips and educating the public will help prevent attacks.”

One year after her injuries Kelly began teaching other children how to stay safe around dogs. She developed programs for schools and founded the nonprofit organization, Prevent The Bite.

“Being attacked by a dog wasn’t a fun experience, but it allowed me to discover a strong desire to help others,” Kelly said. “It doesn’t matter how old you are; if you care about others, you can change the world.”

To kick off National Dog Bite Prevention Week, a press conference will be held at the Whittier Post Office, 8520 Michigan Ave., Whittier, Calif., at 10:30 a.m. Thursday, May 14. Representatives from each of the partnering organizations will participate. The event will include a demonstration on how to properly approach and interact with dogs, as well as a visit with a descendant of the dog that played "Lassie" in films and on TV.

“Employee and customer safety are always our number-one concern,” said Postal Service Vice President and Consumer Advocate Delores J. Killete. “National Dog Bite Prevention Week is one of our most important campaigns to help our employees and customers remain safe when they come in contact with man’s best friend.”

As part of its comprehensive approach, the AVMA has developed a brochure, “What you should know about dog bite prevention,” which offers tips on how to avoid being bitten, as well as what to do if you are bitten by a dog or your dog bites someone. Also offered by the AVMA is “A community approach to dog bite

prevention,” a report intended to help state and local leaders develop effective dog bite prevention programs in their communities. For more information on National Dog Bite Prevention Week and to access the brochure and community guidelines online, visit [www.avma.org/press/publichealth/dogbite/mediakit.asp](http://www.avma.org/press/publichealth/dogbite/mediakit.asp).

Important dog bite injury prevention tips include:

- \* When selecting a pet, choose a dog that is good match for your family and lifestyle. Consult your veterinarian for assistance.
- \* Socialize your pet. Gradually expose your puppy to a variety of people and other animals so it feels at ease in different situations; continue this exposure as your dog gets older. Don't put your dog in a situation where it feels threatened or teased.
- \* Train your dog. Obedience training helps dogs understand what is expected of them and builds a bond of trust between dogs and owner.
- \* Avoid playing aggressive games with your dog.
- \* Keep your dog healthy. Vaccinate your dog against rabies and other preventable infectious diseases. Health care is important because how your dog feels affects how it behaves.
- \* Neuter your pet. Science suggests neutered dogs may be less likely to bite.
- \* Never leave a baby or small child alone with a dog.
- \* Teach your child to ask a dog owner for permission before petting any dog.
- \* Let a strange dog sniff you or your child before touching it, and pet it gently, avoiding the face and tail.

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- \* Never bother a dog if it is sleeping, eating or caring for puppies.
- \* Do not run past a dog.
- \* If a dog threatens you, remain calm. Avoid eye contact. Stand still or back away slowly until the dog leaves. If you are knocked down, curl into a ball and protect your face with your arms and fists.
- \* If bitten, request proof of rabies vaccination from the dog's owner, get the owner's name and contact information, and contact the dog's veterinarian to check vaccination records. Then immediately consult your doctor. Clean bite wound(s) with soap and water as soon as possible.

For more information, visit the AVMA website at [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org).

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The AVMA and its more than 78,000 member veterinarians are engaged in a wide variety of activities dedicated to advancing the science and art of animal, human and public health. Visit the AVMA Web site at [www.avma.org](http://www.avma.org) for more information.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical sub specialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults. For more information visit [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

An independent federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that reaches every address in the nation, 149 million residences, businesses and Post Office Boxes, six days a week. Visit [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com)

The American Society of Maxillofacial Surgeons is the oldest organization representing maxillofacial plastic surgeons. The Society accomplishes its mission to advance the science and practice of surgery of the facial region and the craniofacial skeleton through education, research, and advocacy. For more information, visit [www.maxface.org](http://www.maxface.org).

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons is the largest organization of board-certified plastic surgeons in the world. Representing more than 6,700 members, the Society is recognized as a leading authority and information source on cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgery. For more information, visit [www.plasticsurgery.org](http://www.plasticsurgery.org).

Prevent The Bite's mission is to prevent dog bites to children through education. For more information, visit: [www.preventthebite.org](http://www.preventthebite.org).

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