

Desex pets to help reduce attacks

The Dog and Cat Management Board is reminding pet owners of the benefits of desexing and training following a rise in hospital admissions due to injuries caused by dogs and cats.

Board Member Dr Susan Hazel said research had shown that desexing, while having the obvious benefit of reducing the number of unwanted litters, could also help to reduce aggressive behaviour in dogs.

“In the past financial year, hospital admissions due to dog bites have increased, rising to 236 from 211 the year before,” she said.

“Of course, not all dog bites result in a hospital stay. South Australian councils received 1318 reports of dogs attacking people in 2013-14, slightly down on the previous year’s figure of 1320.

“The main thing to remember is that any dog can bite, not just large dogs or the breeds that are traditionally thought of as being aggressive.”

Hospital admissions due to cat bites and scratches were also up, from 84 in 2012-13 to 111 in 2013-14.

“Cats may bite and scratch if they are stressed or feel threatened, so it’s important to understand how to handle them properly and recognise signs of distress or illness,” Dr Hazel said.

“Cat bites and scratches can also become infected quickly so it’s important to get them checked by your doctor.”

Research has shown that while desexing can help to reduce aggression, a number of other factors also influence animal behaviour.

“Proper training and socialisation play a big part in producing dogs that are a pleasure not only for your family, but for the whole community,” Dr Hazel said.

“Council records show that of the 295,965 dogs registered in South Australia, 201,404 are desexed and 132,125 are microchipped.”

The Dog and Cat Management Board sponsors the ‘Living Safely with Pets’ program, which provides pet safety education to South Australian school students.

In the 2013-14 financial year, this program reached more than 33,000 children through 314 school visits.

“Children need to learn how to be safe around animals, because their instinct is often to pat every dog and cuddle every cat,” Dr Hazel said.

“They are always strongly represented in dog attack statistics, and just over a quarter of the people admitted to hospital because of dog bites last year were under the age of 15.

“In previous years, children under nine have had the highest percentage emergency department presentations for dog-related incidents.

“In 2012-13, children under nine made up 23 percent of the total ED presentations, but last financial year that dropped to 14 per cent.”

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Dr Hazel said anyone thinking about bringing a pet into their home should start with the board's online Select-a-Pet function.

"This helps you ensure that you're choosing the right breed for your family," she said.

"When you get a new pet, be a responsible owner by desexing and microchipping, and if it's a dog, by socialising and training it as well.

"Plenty of walks and playtime will benefit both the family and the dog.

"All pets need enrichment and stimulation, so if you have a cat, provide a scratching post, toys and make time to play with it."

For more information on responsible dog and cat ownership, visit www.gooddogsa.com.au or www.goodcatsa.com.au