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**MPFA LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT DOG BITES**

**Bloomfield Hills, Michigan** – On a hot summer day while her family was in the house, 3-year-old Christine McDonald of Oak Park played in the backyard with the family dog Tipper, a small shepherd/collie mix they took in after Christine’s grandmother had passed away. The family enjoyed having a dog, taking Tipper for walks and playing fetch in the yard. Christine loved petting his long soft fur and giving him hugs, but for some reason on this hot day, Tipper bit Christine on the face when she innocently gave him a hug. The bite caused a deep gash just below her right eye and she had to undergo plastic surgery. After the incident, the family made the heartbreaking decision to put the dog down because they could no longer trust him to be around their children. If the family had known some dogs do not like to be hugged and they should never leave children unsupervised with dogs, this situation could have been prevented and a dog’s life could have been spared.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), more than 4 million dog bites occur each year in the United States ... and not from stray dogs running wild in the streets. The CDC reports that the family dog or the neighbor’s dog inflict the majority (80%) of dog bite-related injuries to children aged 18 and under, with children aged 5-9 having the highest injury rate.

To reduce the number of bite-related injuries, Michigan Pet Fund Alliance (MPFA) has launched a Dog Bite Prevention campaign on their website: <http://www.MichiganPetFund.org/dogbite>. The site features educational resources, including a new video produced by MPFA explaining dog body language. The video features voiceover by Peter Carey, star of the smash hit play “Ernie” by Mitch Albom. Video link: <http://bit.ly/2DeYaUp>

MPFA chairperson Deborah Schutt said, “The key to preventing dog bites is responsible pet ownership and education. Our goal with this campaign is to make our communities safer, free up resources in our shelters, and save more dogs’ lives.”

Responsible pet ownership includes neutering family pets, socialization and training. The CDC reports that intact male dogs are more likely to bite than females. Animal welfare advocates encourage dog owners to make their pet part of the family, not tethered outside in isolation away from humans, which can lead to boredom, frustration and aggression. Dog training techniques using punishment and fear tactics can also cause adverse behavior leading to a bite incident. As a result, dog training has evolved to decrease anxiety and stress in pets by using positive reinforcement and innovative new techniques, like Fear Free founded by “America’s Veterinarian”, Dr. Marty Becker.

Michigan law states when an owned dog bites a human, the bite must be reported to the local animal control agency and the dog must be quarantined for 10 days, either at the owner’s home or at a licensed animal shelter to see if the dog shows any signs of rabies, even if the dog is up to date on the rabies vaccine. Confining dogs at an animal shelter takes up precious space and resources that could be used to house lost or homeless pets.

“We go to extremes to try to avoid dog bites in our shelter,” said Ken Kempkens, director of Humane Society of Macomb. “However, when they do happen, they change the life of the animal, as well as the person who was bit. The person is usually transported to an urgent care clinic where antibiotics are normally given. The dog faces a 10-day quarantine and additional training to ensure it is safe for our staff and to adopt to the public.”

Science-based research shows that dogs typically do not bite without warning or provocation. A dog shows how it is feeling with its eyes, ears, mouth, tail and posture. The resources on the MPFA website help identify the warning signals when a dog is feeling stressed or threatened. Some stress signals are less obvious, like yawning, blinking and nose licking. Other cues are more evident, but can also be misinterpreted, like lying down with a leg up, tail tucking or stiffening up.

Dog bites can also have financial implications. A recent report from State Farm ranks Michigan sixth in the country for the number of dog bite-related insurance claims. QuoteWizard.com says 4.5 million dog bite incidents were reported in 2015 with an average cost of \$37,215 per claim. Quite often the dog owner must pay out of pocket because they do not have sufficient homeowners coverage. Some insurance companies discriminate against certain breeds and homeowners don't even know they aren't covered.

[State Farm](#) states on their website, "State Farm does not exclude homeowners or renters insurance coverage because of the breed of dog owned. Under the right circumstances, any dog might bite, regardless of breed."

Schutt agrees: "Restricting certain dog breeds does not improve public safety. Any dog with a mouth can bite."

#### **ABOUT MICHIGAN PET FUND ALLIANCE**

Michigan Pet Fund Alliance is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable organization that works with shelters, rescue organizations and animal advocates to achieve the goal that no healthy or treatable animal is euthanized due to lack of shelter space or permanent home. For more information, please visit [www.michiganpetfund.org](http://www.michiganpetfund.org).

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