

Cyclists and Dogs -- Yikes

Exploring new territory on your bicycle can be hazardous when you cross into dog territory.

Like other animals, dogs mark their own territory and do not take kindly to cyclists, motorists, joggers or other intruders. If you enter a dog's personal space, be prepared for the dog to enter attack mode. Snarls and furious barking will warn you, and if you don't leave immediately, the dog can launch an attack. This involves snapping at your heels and an attempt to bring you down. A dog attack can throw any cyclist off balance, and cause serious injuries. Knowing how to deal with dog attacks is an important safeguard to cycling. Children or inexperienced cyclists and dogs just don't mix, and these riders should never be allowed to ride where dog attacks can occur.

Dogs tend to attack a cyclist from the rear, usually from the hindquarter direction. However, not all dogs pursue their victims viciously. You can determine whether or not the dog has serious intentions to harm you by noting the gait of the dog. If the dog feels threatened, he will chase faster than usual. His tail will point downward, with mouth open and ears cocked.

If you see a dog approaching from any direction, be sure to guard the front wheel of your bicycle. If the dog suddenly lunges in front of you, it can cause a collision and a fall. Move to the farthest end of the road, and quickly ride away.

Letting out a load-throated yell is another way to deal with an angry dog. This tactic can momentarily surprise the dog and cause him to hesitate. If successful, use the extra seconds and ride away as fast as possible. However if the dog is still in attack mode, ball up your fists and shout angrily. Most dogs are afraid of human violence and may not chase after someone who poses an apparent threat.

It's important to realize that you can't always outrun a dog. Bumpy roads or steep tracks can cause a cyclist to make a particularly slow getaway. This is where a can of pepper spray can come in handy. The spray stings the nose and eyes of the dog, and stops him temporarily without causing any harm.

If all else fails, call out for help. If the dog is serious in his attack, protect yourself by placing the bicycle in between you and the dog. Don't try to kick the dog, as this may make you lose your balance. If you are attacked or are bitten seek medical aid immediately, report the incident to the police and lodge a complaint against the owners. The dog will need to be quarantined to verify if it is rabid.

Cyclists and dogs don't always mix. Be prepared and know how to react if you happen to cross a territorial dog.