



Dog bites are more than a painful shock. They can trigger infections, leave lasting scars, disrupt work, and set off a tangle of insurance and legal issues. I have handled bite cases where a quick phone photograph of the dog's yard sign made the difference, and others where a delayed visit to urgent care complicated both healing and the claim. The path forward is not mysterious, but you need to move with purpose. Below is a practical roadmap, grounded in medical reality and legal experience, for what to do and how a Personal Injury Lawyer builds a strong case after a bite.

First priorities in the minutes and hours after the bite

Your body and your health come first. Most people underestimate how dirty an animal bite can be. Dog bites often drive bacteria deep into tissue. Even if the wound looks small, it can hide a pocket of damage beneath the skin. Immediate, simple steps reduce complications and also create a solid record for any claim that follows.

- Wash the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for several minutes, then cover it with a clean dressing.
- Seek prompt medical care the same day, urgent care or an emergency department, especially if the skin is broken or you are immunocompromised.
- Ask about a tetanus booster if you have not had one in the last 5 to 10 years, and discuss antibiotics when the wound is puncture-like or on the hand or face.
- Report the bite to local animal control, provide the owner's information if you have it, and ask for a case number.
- Take photos of the injuries, the location, the dog if safe, and anything relevant like broken fencing, an open gate, or warning signs.

Those five actions cover health, documentation, and official notice. They also help your injury attorney prove that you acted responsibly and that the bite is the cause of your losses.

Why the medical record matters more than you might think

In bite cases, medical charts are the spine of the claim. Adjusters and jurors alike pay attention to what doctors saw, wrote, and recommended. If you tell the nurse that a neighbor's German Shepherd bit you at noon on Elm Street, and that note appears in your chart the same day, you lock down a clean causation timeline. Photographs stitched into the record, X-rays checking for tooth fragments, and a plastic surgeon's consult for facial wounds all carry weight.

Two common pitfalls hurt victims later. First, people often try to power through because they are embarrassed or worried about cost. Delayed treatment opens the door for the insurer to argue that an infection or scarring came from poor aftercare, not the bite. Second, inconsistent follow up undermines the seriousness of your injury. If your doctor recommends a wound check in three days and you skip it, the other side will say you must have been fine. A good personal injury attorney will review your medical trajectory with you and highlight gaps that need attention.

Reporting and the public health side

Local health authorities take bites seriously because of rabies risk, even though canine rabies is rare in the United States. In most counties, animal control will open an incident file and either verify the dog's vaccination status or order a 10 day quarantine. If you know the owner, exchange contact information and ask for the dog's rabies vaccination certificate number and the veterinarian's clinic. If the dog is unknown, such as a stray, report that clearly. In a few cases, doctors start post exposure rabies prophylaxis when the dog cannot be found. That treatment is expensive and unpleasant, so quick reporting and owner cooperation can save you money and worry.

The animal control report serves another role. It corroborates your account. I have seen defense counsel argue that a cut came from a fall or a fence, not a bite, only to run into a detailed animal control narrative with photos and a map. When your story lines up with official findings, the claim moves faster.

Liability rules that often decide the case

Every state has its own approach to dog bite liability. Many use a form of strict liability, meaning the owner is responsible for a bite regardless of the dog's prior behavior, subject to exceptions like provocation or trespassing. Some states allow recovery through negligence even if strict liability does not apply. For example, failing to secure a gate, ignoring leash laws, or letting a dog roam can support a negligence claim.

In Colorado, where a Greeley personal injury lawyer often practices, the law imposes strict liability on owners for serious bodily injury or death caused by dogs, with specific exceptions for trespassers, provocation, or working dogs on duty. Lesser injuries may still be compensable under a negligence theory. Colorado also follows a modified comparative negligence rule. If the injured person's share of fault is 50 percent or more, recovery is barred, and if it is less, the award is reduced by that percentage. That nuance matters when a defense team claims the victim teased the dog or ignored a posted sign.

This is where an experienced accident attorney earns their keep. They fit the facts into the right legal framework and prepare for likely arguments about provocation, trespass, or comparative fault. I once handled a case where a delivery driver stepped into a partially fenced yard to drop a package and was bitten near the porch. The owner insisted the driver trespassed. We established that the path functioned as an implied invitation for deliveries and that a missing latch on the side gate let the dog reach the porch. With that context, the trespass defense lost steam.

Insurance coverage and where the money comes from

In most dog bite claims, the money comes from insurance. Homeowner's policies commonly cover dog bites unless the breed is excluded or the policy has a specific dog liability exclusion. Limits vary, but many policies provide 100,000 to 300,000 dollars for liability coverage, sometimes more. Renters insurance can also cover bites. If the owner was walking the dog away from home, the same homeowner's policy often still applies.

Two traps catch clients off guard. First, people hesitate to file a claim because the owner is a friend or neighbor. Remember, you are not reaching into their personal bank account. You are invoking a policy they paid for, just as they would use your auto policy if you backed into their car. Second, some owners do not have coverage or refuse to share it. In those cases, a personal injury attorney sends a preservation letter and a request for disclosure, then evaluates assets, potential landlord liability for known dangerous conditions, or negligence by a caretaker like a dog walker.

The practical steps a lawyer takes behind the scenes

Once retained, a lawyer's early work sets the table for the rest of the case. You will hear terms like **accident attorney** preservation notice, subrogation, and demand package. Here is what that usually means in plain English.

- Issue preservation letters to the owner and any third parties asking them to keep photos, video, vet records, and correspondence.
- Gather and organize core documents: medical records, animal control reports, vaccination proof, witness contact information, and photos.
- Verify insurance coverage, policy limits, and exclusions, then open a claim with the carrier.
- Track your medical course, help schedule key consults if needed, and monitor bills and liens from health insurers or providers.
- Prepare a demand package that explains liability, details injuries and costs, and anchors settlement with clear numbers and visuals.

That is the second and final list you will see in this article. These tasks look simple on paper. In real life, they often require persuasion and persistence. An adjuster might sit on a records request. A clinic may code a visit incorrectly, hiding an important plastic surgery recommendation. A veterinarian's file could show the dog bit a groomer last year, but you will not get it without a proper authorization or a subpoena. A steady hand makes a difference.

Evidence that carries real weight

Quality claims are built like good cases in court, not like insurance forms. Pictures within the first 24 hours matter because swelling and bruising evolve. Video from a porch camera can prove that the dog pushed through a warped gate. Witness statements written within a day or two are more reliable than those taken weeks later. If you overhear the owner say, I thought I latched the gate, your lawyer will want that in a contemporaneous note or a recorded statement, depending on jurisdictional rules.

Beyond the obvious, think about patterns. Has the dog lunged at passersby before? Did the HOA send warnings about leash rules? Did the landlord receive complaints about an aggressive dog in common areas? Paper trails tell stories. A personal injury attorney will trace those threads to build a negligence theory even when strict liability has exceptions.

Understanding damages, from medical bills to scars you see in the mirror

It is easy to count stitches. It is harder to measure the impact of a bite on a musician's hand or a child's fear of dogs after a face wound. A thorough damages picture includes:

- Past and future medical costs, including antibiotics, wound care, scar revision, and therapy for range of motion or nerve issues.
- Lost income for missed shifts, reduced hours, or light duty, and lost earning capacity when injuries affect future work.
- Pain and suffering, which in bite cases often includes acute pain followed by itch, pulling, and tightness from scar tissue.
- Disfigurement and impairment. Colorado law, for instance, recognizes disfigurement as a distinct harm, and plastic surgery opinions help value it.
- Out of pocket expenses such as compression garments, silicone sheets, rides to appointments, and child care during treatments.

Insurers tend to discount scarring until you present clear, well lit photos over time and a medical opinion about likely permanence. Where I have seen claims jump meaningfully is when a treating clinician explains, for example, that a jagged scar on a waitress's inner forearm will remain visible at conversational distance and that scar revision could cost 6,000 to 12,000 dollars depending on technique and number of sessions. Precision beats generalities.

Timelines that shape your strategy

Most states give you a limited time to file a lawsuit after a bite. In Colorado, the statute of limitations for personal injury claims is generally two years from the date of injury. Missing that window can end your claim entirely. There are rare exceptions, such as for minors, but never count on them without legal advice. There is also a practical timeline. Medical treatment needs time to stabilize, especially with scarring. Settlement before the scar matures can shortchange you. Lawyers balance these clocks by opening the claim early, pressing for clear liability admissions, and [Great site](#) negotiating once the medical picture is settled or reasonably predictable.

When the owner blames you

Allegations of provocation surface often. The defense might say you approached too quickly, reached over a fence, or ignored a warning sign. Context matters. Children do not assess risk the way adults do. Delivery workers follow routes and instructions. Runners and dog walkers share sidewalks. Many jurisdictions frame provocation narrowly, and mere presence near a dog is not enough. Your lawyer will gather details that show normal, expected behavior on your part and focus on the owner's duties, like leashing, controlling, and maintaining secure enclosures.

Comparative negligence can still reduce a payout even when liability is clear. A classic example involves off leash play in a public park where both owners allowed dogs to roam, and a bite occurred during a scuffle. A Greeley personal injury lawyer would analyze local ordinances, witness accounts, and any park signage to argue down the percentage attributed to the victim.

How settlements usually unfold

Most dog bite cases resolve without trial. After treatment reaches a plateau, your attorney compiles a demand package. It includes a letter explaining liability, medical records, billing statements, wage documentation, photographs over time, and reports from specialists if needed. A reasonable demand anchors negotiation. When the carrier responds, the back and forth can take weeks or months.

Some adjusters use a playbook, leading with a low offer and pointing to quick recovery notes in the chart or casting doubt on future scar revision. A seasoned injury attorney anticipates these points and has counter evidence ready, such as a surgeon's note about contracture near a joint or a therapist's range of motion logs. If negotiations stall, mediation may close the gap. If not, filing suit becomes the next step. Filing does not mean you are headed for a courtroom tomorrow. It means you preserve rights and gain access to discovery tools.

Litigation without the mystique

If your case proceeds to litigation, expect structured phases. Initial pleadings set positions. Written discovery exchanges information and documents. Depositions take testimony under oath from you, the dog owner, witnesses, and sometimes medical providers. Expert opinions may address scarring, vocational impact, or animal behavior. Along the way, settlement remains on the table. Many cases resolve after depositions clarify strengths and weaknesses.

Court brings risks and costs. Juries are human. Some jurors grew up with dogs and believe that bites always have a trigger. Others, particularly those who have seen a child's lasting scar, take a hard line on control and responsibility. Your personal injury attorney will level with you about the odds. I advise clients with two numbers in mind, a rational acceptance number and a bottom line. The first is where you should feel comfortable resolving. The second is where trial risk begins to make more sense than compromise.

Children, seniors, and other special considerations

Bites to children often involve the face and head. The emotional and social ripple effects can run deep. Kid friendly care settings, plastic surgery consults, and child psychologists may be part of the plan. Legally, courts sometimes require that settlements for minors be approved by a judge to protect the child's interests, and the funds may be placed in restricted accounts until adulthood. A personal injury attorney with experience in pediatric claims will guide parents through these extra steps.

Seniors face higher infection risks and slower healing, especially with diabetes or vascular issues. A seemingly modest hand bite can threaten independence if swelling and stiffness linger. Documentation of baseline function before the bite helps clarify impact. ADA related accommodations at work or home may be relevant and compensable.

What to do if the owner refuses to cooperate

I have seen owners deny, deflect, or disappear. If the owner refuses to share policy information, your lawyer can send a formal request for disclosure and, if needed, file suit to compel answers. If the dog is unlicensed or unvaccinated, animal control pressure can shake loose cooperation. If there is no insurance, you still have options. You can pursue the owner personally, explore whether a landlord had notice of a dangerous condition and failed to act, or investigate whether a business, such as a pet sitter or groomer, had custody and bears responsibility. The strategy depends on facts, which is why early, thorough investigation matters.

Costs, fees, and what to expect from representation

Most bite victims hire on a contingency fee, meaning the lawyer's fee is a percentage of the recovery and there is no fee if there is no recovery. Ask about case costs as well, such as fees for medical records, experts, and filing. Reputable firms will walk you through a written agreement in plain language. Communication is crucial. You

should know who will handle your file day to day, and how often to expect updates. A good accident attorney does not push for fast, low settlements to turn files. They pace the case to your medical reality and legal leverage.

If you are in northern Colorado, a Greeley personal injury lawyer will also be familiar with Weld County procedures, local judges, and the personalities on the defense side. Local knowledge smooths scheduling, improves mediation choices, and often shortens the time from claim to check.

A brief, practical recap you can act on

Act fast on health, documentation, and reporting. Keep treatment consistent and follow medical advice. Loop in a qualified Personal Injury Lawyer early, even before the first insurance call, so you do not give a statement that can be twisted against you. Expect the process to take time, especially if scarring is involved. And remember that most claims resolve with insurance dollars, not neighbor to neighbor conflict.

Evidence and documents worth gathering in the first two weeks

- Medical records and bills from every visit, including urgent care, primary care, and specialists.
- Animal control report number, officer name, and any follow up notices.
- Photos of injuries and the scene on multiple days, day 1, day 3, day 10, to show evolution.
- Contact details for witnesses and the dog owner, plus any exchange about vaccinations.
- Proof of lost income, such as pay stubs, schedules, and employer notes about missed shifts.

Bring these to your first meeting with an injury attorney. The stronger your packet, the quicker your claim finds traction.

Final thoughts from the field

Dog bites sit at the intersection of health, public safety, and civil responsibility. The law expects owners to control animals, and it expects victims to act reasonably after being hurt. When both sides meet those expectations, claims resolve cleanly. When they do not, the record you build in the first hours and days gives your lawyer the leverage needed to hold the right party accountable. Whether you work with a local Greeley personal injury lawyer or another trusted personal injury attorney, insist on clear communication, transparent strategy, and a plan that respects both your medical healing and your financial recovery.

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FAQ About Personal Injury Lawyer

Is it worth suing for personal injury?

Suing for a personal injury is generally worth it if you have severe injuries, mounting medical bills, and lost wages. However, it is rarely worth the time and effort for minor bumps and bruises where you recover quickly.

What not to say to a personal injury lawyer?

Never hide details, lie, or downplay your symptoms when speaking to a personal injury lawyer. Withholding information or fabricating details destroys your credibility, provides insurance companies an excuse to deny your claim, and makes it impossible for your attorney to properly advocate on your behalf.

How much do most personal injury lawyers charge?

Most personal injury lawyers charge a contingency fee, meaning you pay nothing upfront. They take a percentage of your final settlement or jury verdict—typically ranging from 33% to 40%—and only get paid if you win your case.