



Pathology & Biology Section – 2005

G10 Fatal Dog Maulings Associated With Infant Swings

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become familiar with the phenomenon of dog bite-related fatalities involving children left unattended in infant swings. In addition, attendees will become familiar with the epidemiological, medical, and forensic aspects of fatal dog maulings in children.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by suggesting an as yet undescribed association between infant swing use and dog attacks, which may have significant child safety implications. It will also impact the forensic community by increasing its awareness of the general features of dog-bite-related fatalities.

Two cases of fatal dog maulings of children left unattended in windup infant swings are presented, an event not previously described in the literature. In addition, a review of dog bite fatalities in children autopsied in Baltimore over the last ten years and a review of the existing literature on this topic will be presented.

Case 1: A two-and-a-half-week old male infant was left in a wind-up swing by his parents, who went outside to smoke cigarettes. The family dog, a one year-old pit bull named "Jigga," remained in the room with the infant. Upon their return, the parents discovered that the swing was overturned and the infant was on the floor, unresponsive, with bite marks to the body and face. Postmortem examination revealed multiple injuries, including contusions, abrasions, lacerations, and puncture wounds of the head and torso, fracture of the parietal skull, subarachnoid hemorrhage, multiple anterior and posterior rib fractures bilaterally, contusions of the lungs and heart, and lacerations of the liver.

Case 2: A three-month-old male infant was asleep in a wind-up swing when his parents went to bed in a separate bedroom. Three hours later, the mother awoke and, upon checking the infant, found him on the floor unresponsive with the swing tipped over. The family dogs that were present, an eight year-old Chow named "Sandy" and a nine year-old Dachshund named "CoCo," were removed by Animal Control. Postmortem examination revealed multiple injuries consistent with attack by a medium to large sized dog, including numerous contusions, abrasions, lacerations, and puncture wounds of the skin; damage to the atlanto-occipital joint; fractures of the skull, mandible, clavicle, and ribs; rupture of the spleen and left kidney; laceration of the liver; and contusions of the lung.

Dog bite-related fatalities are uncommon events. Children are at particularly high risk, because the majority of dog bites occur in children and children are more susceptible to severe injury from dog bites. Other known risk factors for fatal dog attacks include male gender of the victim and dog breed; a majority of attacks occur on the dog-owner's property and often without any known provocation.

Canine aggression is a well-described behavioral phenomenon and has been subdivided into various types; of these, predatory aggression refers to the hard-wired instinctual drive to chase, catch, and kill prey. A distinguishing feature of predatory aggression is that it is usually triggered by movement, often with little change in the dog's mood. In each of the above cases, infants were left unattended in mobile wind-up swings in the presence of trusted household pets. These cases not only underscore the importance of not leaving young children unattended in the presence of pet dogs, but also raise the possibility that mobile swings may trigger a predatory response in dogs and thus may represent an additional risk factor for dog attack.

Dog, Infant, Swing