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Emergency, Critical Care & Referral Hospital



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## 10 Ways to Protect Family Pets From Coyote Attacks

**Highlands Ranch, Colorado**—Cody, a 2-year-old Maltese, was enjoying an evening walk with his family when a coyote attacked. The dog wasn't roaming through open space. Cody was strolling down the sidewalk of a residential neighborhood, leash firmly attached to his owner's wrist. The coyote appeared suddenly, rushed across the street, and grabbed Cody around his chest. Had the Maltese not been wearing a leash, Cody may have never been seen again. Cody's family rushed him to Animal Hospital Specialty Center in Highlands Ranch, where veterinarians treated the dog for shock, multiple punctures and lacerations, and broken ribs.



Unfortunately, this scenario has become common as wildlife collides with suburban living. Because many Front Range neighborhoods are flanked by lakes, streams, hills, and natural coyote habitat, interactions between wildlife and pets are inevitable. Coyotes are usually timid and shy, avoiding people whenever possible. Occasionally, coyotes have attacked people, and the frequency is increasing due to housing growth in areas that border wildlife. Understanding coyote behavior and following safety tips can minimize the frequency and severity of these attacks.

Coyotes are members of the dog family, averaging 20 to 40 pounds. Most live in packs of six closely-related coyotes and hunt in pairs. Their howl is often described as the song of the West. At night, coyotes use howls and short, high-pitched yips to keep in touch with others nearby. Coyotes have good senses of smell, vision and hearing, as well being extremely alert and wary, enabling them to survive in both wild and urban areas. Their natural habitat is open grassland, but coyotes will move to wherever food is available. Coyotes hunt both day and night, though are most active at

dusk and dawn. They eat a varied diet of meat and fish with occasional fruits, vegetables and insects. Coyotes are scavengers that adapt to whatever food sources are available.

Like other wildlife, coyotes can spread diseases to both pets and people. Distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, and mange can be transmitted between a coyote and dog in close contact. Parasites such as mites, ticks, fleas, heartworms, and intestinal worms can be spread to pets. Intestinal parasites, rabies and tularemia can cause diseases in humans as well as animals.

Here's 10 ways that you can protect pets and yourself from coyote attacks:



**1. Never leave pets unattended outdoors, especially when coyotes are most active from dusk until dawn.** Coyotes also are more active in spring while feeding and protecting their young. If pets must stay outside, keep them in a coyote-proof yard or kennel.

**2. Never feed coyotes!** Becoming a regular source of food will keep coyotes in your

neighborhood. Feeding coyotes teaches them to be less fearful of humans.

**3. Feed pets indoors.** Never leave pet food outside at night.

**4. Don't hang birdfeeders in your yard.** Bird seed attracts rodents, which then attracts coyotes.

**5. Don't leave trash bags outside unless they're placed in a trash can with a securely locking lid.** Bungee cords or ropes should be used to secure trash cans to a fence or wall.

**6. Install or convert your fence to prevent coyotes from entering your yard.** Coyotes are talented jumpers and can easily propel over fences and walls. To prevent entry, fences should be 5 to 6 feet high and constructed of heavy-duty material such as brick, cement blocks, wood, or net-wire. Fence extenders that extend 15 to 20 inches outward can help prevent coyotes from climbing fences. Coyotes are avid diggers but can be discouraged from tunneling under fences with the addition of a 4 to 6 foot wire apron or an electric trip wire.

**7. Install motion sensor lights around your house.** Coyotes are often startled by sudden movements.

**8. Clear brush or vegetation from the yard that may provide homes for small rodents and attract coyotes.** Clearing debris serves another purpose as coyotes are good hunters and will use these areas to stalk prey.

**9. Always use a leash when walking your dog.** Coyotes live in every area of Colorado, from mountain communities to the city of Denver.

**10. Scare away coyotes if you're approached.** Your goal is to have coyotes fear you and leave. Make yourself appear as large as possible by waving your arms. Loud noises such as yelling, clapping your hands, blowing a whistle, or knocking two sticks together will startle coyotes.

Always notify local law enforcement and animal control agencies if coyotes attack humans or pets, or if they show a lack of fear by approaching humans. You can reach the Colorado Division of Wildlife at 303-297-1192.

Living in Colorado means living with coyotes. With 75,000 to 200,000 coyotes in Colorado and rising attacks, you need to know how to protect yourself and furry family members from dangerous wildlife. Following safety tips can keep coyotes at a distance and prevent the physical and emotional trauma that Cody sustained. Other than a few scars, Cody made a full recovery and continues long walks with a more observant family during afternoons rather than evenings.

### **About Animal Hospital Specialty Center**

Animal Hospital Specialty Center is a specialty and emergency hospital that cares for Colorado's best friends 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The hospital is located near C-470, just south of Holly Street & County Line Road, at 5640 County Line Place in Highlands Ranch. A staff of 12 veterinarians offers internal medicine, surgery, oncology, acupuncture, and emergency services.

For more than 40 years, Animal Hospital Specialty Center has provided quality care for dogs, cats, and exotic pets. The hospital offers medical boarding for pets that need 24-hour care. Animal Hospital Specialty Center is accredited by the American Animal Hospital Association. Only 3,000 primary care and specialty hospitals in the United States and Canada are accredited to meet the highest standards in veterinary medicine. For information, call (303) 740-9595 or visit [www.ahscvets.com](http://www.ahscvets.com).

### **About the Author**



Dr. Tanya L. Kim is an emergency veterinarian at Animal Hospital Specialty Center in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She provides emergency care for dogs, cats, and exotic pets. Her special interests include emergency medicine, exotics, anesthesia, and analgesia. Dr. Kim earned her doctorate in veterinary medicine from Iowa State University. She has a German shepherd named Lola and kitty named Battle Cat. You can reach Dr. Kim at Animal Hospital Specialty Center at 303-740-9595 or [tkim@ahscvets.com](mailto:tkim@ahscvets.com).