



Street Dogs and Multispecies Health in India

Guidelines for Conflict Prevention and
Safe Cohabitation



Preface

These guidelines contain practical steps and relevant background information on preventing and mitigating street dog-human conflict. They have been developed for individuals, communities, street dog caregivers, and policymakers with the overarching aim of advancing safe and healthy cohabitation.

The strategies and principles in these guidelines stem from long-term field research in India by the [ROH Indies](#) project, which combines human geography, behavioural ecology, social psychology, and history to investigate people-street dog interactions in rural and urban communities. The study encompasses surveys and interviews with the general public, street dog caregivers & practitioners involved in street dog welfare and management, including rabies prevention; on-the-ground socio-ecological observations; and archival, legal and media research. This plurality of vantage points has enabled the project to identify and understand long-term transformations in the social, ecological, and legal landscapes pertaining to street dogs in India.

In particular, these guidelines are shaped by findings on: a) the character of everyday interactions between people and street dogs; b) the key drivers of human-street dog conflict. Our research indicates that changes in caregiving practices have been affecting the diversity of human-street dog relationships and the socio-ecological conditions that have enabled sustained cohabitation. This in turn has led to increased polarisation around street dogs at both the grassroots level and in public and legal platforms. These guidelines, therefore, are designed (a) to prevent and mitigate situations of grassroots conflict; (b) to allow for the wide range of human-street dog relationships to re-emerge; and (c) to strengthen the skills and knowledge needed to foster sustained multispecies cohabitation and health. In conclusion, we provide a framework that maps strategies to concerns at the street dog-public health interface.

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Types of human-street dog conflict in India

Human-street dog conflict in India can be of different types and manifests at different scales.

Type 1: Conflict between people about street dogs (e.g., conflicts over feeding); Scales: neighbourhoods; media; litigation and policy

Type 2: Human aggression towards dogs (e.g., relocation, poisoning, intentional harm); Scale: neighbourhoods/local

Type 3: Dog behaviours that are perceived as aggressive (e.g., chasing, mobbing, jumping, grabbing); Scale: neighbourhoods/local

Type 4: Dog aggression towards humans and owned dogs (e.g., bites, aggressive chasing); Scale: neighbourhoods/local

Type 5: Deaths or serious injuries due to mauling

These different types of conflict need different responses. **In all cases, prevention is the best approach.**

Conflict prevention at the neighbourhood level

Conflict prevention strategies at the local scale fall under two categories and are best carried out when there is *no ongoing conflict*:

- a) Smart caregiving designed to prevent or reduce conflict (especially Types 1, 2 and 3)
- b) Community awareness about safety around street dogs (especially Types 3 and 4)
- c) Up to date vaccination against rabies with careful maintenance of vaccination records (for reference in the case of bites)

For more information see the sections on [smart caregiving](#) and [community safety awareness](#).

Conflict mitigation at the neighbourhood level

Conflict mitigation strategies are required in *situations of ongoing conflict*. This guidance focuses on conflict mitigation at the local or neighbourhood level for conflict Types 3 and 4.

1. **Take the complainant seriously:** Ensure that the complainant(s) feels heard and understood. Reassure them that the necessary action will be taken. In the case of bites, provide information on the vaccination status

of the concerned dog. Provide appropriate guidance on post-bite treatment by referring them to the [WHO decision tree for post-exposure prophylaxis](#). This is key to understanding the concerns of the complainant and preventing retaliatory action against the dog in question or all dogs in the area.

2. Understand the nature of the conflict and its drivers: The main drivers of Type 3 and Type 4 conflict are:

- Attachment to specific caregivers and locations, resulting in territorial or protective pet-like behaviours towards people including aggressive barking or chasing and biting.
- Boredom, playfulness, or curiosity resulting in pet-like behaviours such as non-aggressive chasing, mobbing, jumping, and grabbing of clothes or packages.
- Anxiety or fear, commonly seen in dogs that have been relocated.
- Infrequently, rabies or aggressive personalities.

3. Address the drivers of conflict:

3a. Conflict stemming from pet-like behaviours and/or aggressive personalities can be addressed by creating the conditions for the re-development of normal street dog skills and behaviours, including foraging for food and being cautious around people. This involves:

- Reducing attachment to specific people and/or locations
- Reducing dependency on regular feeding (except for sick, injured, emaciated, old, orphaned, lactating, distressed dogs, or dogs in closed areas with no food sources)
- Re-schooling for normal street dog behaviours and skills. This includes appropriate use of non-violent and harmless aversive actions (e.g., withholding affection, ignoring them, walking away from them, saying 'no' in a firm voice etc.). The aim is to prevent the dog that is displaying the undesired behaviour from approaching people, including caregivers, unless invited to do so.
- Encouraging the dog to interact safely with other people. Engage with some of the people the dog displays undesired behaviours towards (e.g., sanitation workers, other residents of the neighbourhood). If they are willing, provide them with treats that they can offer to the concerned dog, initially at a distance, and

progressing towards closer contact. They can also be encouraged to talk to the dog in a reassuring tone when there is barking or other undesired behaviours.

- Socialising the dog with local owned dogs. Request owners to first establish familiarity between themselves and the concerned dog without the owned dogs around. This can be done with treats and regular contact. Once a good relationship has been formed between the owner and the concerned street dog, gradual familiarisation with the owned dogs can be undertaken.

For more detail see the section on [smart feeding](#).

3b. Conflict stemming from anxiety or fear requires close work with the concerned dog to help him/her stabilise. This typically involves, for a temporary period:

- a) Consistent contact with the dog to reassure them
- b) Regular feeding to build trust and allow them to adapt to the local environment
- c) Encouraging them to move away from locations where they are not welcome (e.g., inside buildings) by setting up makeshift bedding and a water bowl, and feeding them at an appropriate location that can act as a safe space till they have stabilised.
- d) At the right time, getting them neutered and vaccinated.

Note: once the dog has stabilised, wean them off regular feeding and excessive contact with caregivers to prevent pet-like behaviours.

4. Implement environmental modifications and community safety education: In some circumstances, environmental modifications and/or safety guidance for residents, employees, and passersby might be required. This can include:

- The construction of well-marked speed breakers at close intervals to prevent speeding (and thereby prevent chasing)
- Clearing any excessive availability of food (both intentional feeding and waste, especially at roadside eateries and meat stalls) and other resources that attract dogs and may provoke conflict between street dogs or between street dogs and people
- Installing gates at the bottom of stairs or other exit/entry points to prevent dogs from entering buildings
- Putting up signage on how to avoid being chased (e.g., slow down; stop if chased)

- Sharing targeted guidance on chasing and bite prevention with local people, preferably through one-on-one conversations to provide resource materials; see [section on bite prevention guidance](#).
 - Recommending, and where required, providing resources for the close supervision of children, especially during playtime, in areas with street dogs
5. In cases where rabies is suspected, confine the dog and either observe for 10 days (only if it is possible to maintain high-welfare conditions) or euthanise.
 6. In cases of personality driven aggression that does not respond to other interventions, there might be a case for the targeted removal of the concerned dog (e.g., adoption by an experienced caregiver or transfer to a well-managed, high-welfare sanctuary).

Preventing street dog feeding conflicts: Some principles

1. Do not feed healthy street dogs complete or full meals regularly.

Feed occasionally and/or in small quantities. Reserve regular feeding of complete meals for sick, old, lactating, or starving dogs and orphaned animals.

Why? 1) To prevent over-attachment and dependency on specific people and locations;
2) To preserve key street skills related to foraging and coexistence with a wide range of people. Foraging is important for a dog's well-being.

2. Prevent crowding, chasing, & pet-like aggression.

Spread out feeding locations. Avoid feeding daily in the same spot. Avoid feeding or being affectionate in the same location as where the dog(s) take shelter.

Why? To ensure that the availability of food, shelter and affection is not concentrated in particular locations.

3. Stop feeding temporarily if dogs congregate or show undesired behaviours like chasing/barking.

Avoid and completely ignore dogs that start chasing, barking at or nipping people and vehicles.

Why? To stop undesired behaviours. Do modify feeding practices to ensure that undesired behaviours do not resume.

4. Reduce dependency gradually.

If dogs rely on regular feeding, taper quantity and frequency while monitoring their foraging and health.

Why? To restore their ability to secure food, shelter and affection from a wide range of people and locations.

5. Avoid treating street dogs like pets.

Why? Pet-like treatment of street dogs leads to conflict behaviours and has negative consequences for them because of retaliatory violence. Street dogs can be very affectionate and friendly towards some people and aggressive towards those they perceive as strangers or those that are uncomfortable around or scared of dogs.

6. Engage with the community.

Do address concerns collaboratively to resolve conflicts.

7. Do not rely solely on current laws about feeding and caring for street dogs.

Laws protecting street dogs can be challenged. Ensuring community goodwill enables dogs' safety and acceptance.

Street dog feeding conflicts: Frequently Asked Questions

Why do friendly street dogs chase, bark at, and exhibit aggressive behaviours towards some people?

The *excess availability of food resources*, especially through the daily feeding of full and complete meals to healthy dogs, leads to attachment to specific locations and specific people (feeders and caregivers).

This in turn leads to pet-like aggression (chasing, barking, crowding, nipping) towards people that the dogs perceive as strangers and towards those that are uncomfortable around dogs. These behaviours can sometimes also be linked to *increased leisure and boredom* stemming from reduced foraging because of regular, complete feeding.

The availability of excessive food also makes dogs less territorial towards other dogs leading to congregation (of dogs) in feeding sites because of migration from other areas.

Why are these conflict behaviours dangerous for street dogs?

These behaviours lead to *retaliatory action and violence*, including stoning, hitting, removal and relocation, and poisoning.

More than 25% of the cases related to human-street dog conflict in the Supreme Court and High Courts from January 2022 – June 2024 pertain to feeding. Any of these cases could result *in legislative change that removes existing legal protections* for street dogs. Till 2001, street dogs were killed by local authorities (e.g., municipal corporations). The ABC Rules put a stop to that, but these Rules can be changed through Parliament and repealed by court judgements.

Where will street dogs get food if they are not fed regularly?

Street dogs have always been foragers. Foraging is not only from garbage but also from people – such as at tea stalls, roadside restaurants and meat stalls, sanitation workers, auto drivers, and residents putting out leftovers. Even today, most street dogs in India are foragers. Foraging is an important street skill for street dogs and can be a positive life-experience for them.

Does that mean we should not feed street dogs at all?

No. It just means that feeding needs to be *smart and street dog-friendly*.

- Do not feed healthy dogs regularly or complete meals. They can be fed sporadically and/or in small quantities to build trust.
- Regular, complete feeding should be directed only at starving, sick, or lactating dogs and orphaned puppies. Once these dogs recover/are ready to be independent, they should be gradually weaned off regular, complete feeding

- If dogs start to gather (whether permanently or temporarily) in locations where you are feeding a dog, pause feeding in that area.
- Address conflict behaviours immediately, if necessary, by stopping feeding and removing affection and attention temporarily.

People have always given food to street dogs. Why has feeding become a major source of conflict now?

Till recently, very few people would feed street dogs regularly. Over the last 10 years, and especially after lockdown, much larger numbers of people feed complete meals to several street dogs regularly. Very often, such feeding ends up being concentrated in certain neighbourhoods which means that there is an excessive availability of food in these locations.

Regular feeders tend to really like dogs and so dogs that are fed get much more attention and affection than dogs that forage. This makes them possessive of their feeders, territorial of their feeding sites, and aggressive towards other people (non-feeders).

The large quantities of food that are made available mean that new dogs start congregating in locations where some dogs are being fed. Resident dogs also become less territorial towards new dogs because food is not scarce.

Smart feeding of street dogs

Feeding street dogs is an act of compassion. However, regular feeding can unintentionally create problems for them. It can make street dogs dependent and reduce their natural foraging skills. It adversely affects their ability to interact with a wide variety of people, including those that dislike them. It also can lead to territorial and attachment behaviours like barking or chasing. These issues escalate conflicts between people, putting the safety of street dogs at risk. Strategic/modified feeding practices can ensure the well-being of street dogs while fostering harmony between people and dogs.

Pros of regular feeding	Cons of regular feeding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional source of food for street dogs • Socialised relations between street dogs and people • Sense of fulfilment for feeders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages dependency, reducing the ability to forage naturally • Reduces street skills and the ability to interact with different kinds of people causing human-dog conflict • Leads to territoriality and attachment, leading to barking and chasing • Promotes congregation, increasing dog fights and nuisance complaints • Attracts hostility from those averse to street dogs, risking harm or relocation, and even killing • Has generated several court cases asking for repeal of ABC Rules and removal of street dogs and/or ban on all feeding in public spaces

Smart feeding aims to retain the benefits of feeding street dogs—such as providing support to those in need and fostering positive human-dog relationships. At the same time, it minimizes the risks of dependency, conflict, and harm. By adopting smart practices, feeders can promote the well-being of dogs and their peaceful coexistence with the community.

1. When to feed

Only feed animals that are sick, old, lactating, or starving or orphaned (i.e., young ones). Healthy dogs usually find enough food through foraging and do not require additional feeding.

2. Entirely avoid regular or complete feeding

Do not feed street dogs regularly or provide complete meals. Feeding should be

occasional and limited in quantity to prevent dependency. Regular feeding can reduce their natural foraging skills, making them reliant on a few people and unable to interact safely with other people. It leads to conflict behaviours such as barking, chasing, and territorial aggression. By feeding sporadically and in smaller amounts, dogs remain self-reliant and better integrated into their environment.

3. Prevent congregation

Spread out feeding locations to avoid groups of dogs gathering, which leads to fights and community complaints. If dogs start to congregate in one location, stop feeding till they disperse completely.

4. Practice invisible feeding: choose discreet times and locations

Feed during quiet hours and away from highly visible places to minimize disturbances and reduce visibility to those averse to street dogs.

5. Leave no trace

Clean up any leftover food, containers, or waste to prevent negative reactions from the community,

6. Gradually reduce dependency

If dogs are already accustomed to regular feeding, reduce the quantity and frequency over time while monitoring their ability to forage independently.

7. Avoid treating street dogs like pets

Maintain distance to prevent street dogs from becoming overly attached to feeders, which can lead to territorial and conflict behaviours. Street dogs need the skills to negotiate human society on their own.

8. Adapt smart feeding practices to address conflict

If feeding causes congregation or aggression, modify your approach or pause feeding temporarily. Completely ignore territorial dogs that bark, chase, follow or mob people to discourage attachment or dominance behaviours.

9. Engage with community concerns

Take complaints seriously and work collaboratively with mediators to resolve conflicts without confrontation.

10. Ensure dogs are vaccinated regularly

Vaccinate the dogs you feed, especially against rabies, to protect their health and public safety.

11. Provide fresh drinking water

Street dogs find it more difficult to access drinking water than food. Providing fresh drinking water alongside food is essential, particularly when feeding dry food like kibble. Keep water containers clean and regularly refilled. Liaise with municipal authorities and residents' associations to pre-empt concerns about mosquito breeding.

12. Do not rely solely on current laws about feeding and street dogs

Legal provisions that protect street dogs and support feeding can face challenges. Prioritizing responsible, conflict-free feeding creates community goodwill and ensures the safety and acceptance of street animals.

Safety around street dogs

To stop street dogs from chasing or barking

- Stay calm and still
- Walk away very slowly, and if possible, while talking in a soothing tone to the dog(s).
- Slow down the vehicle when approaching street dogs
- Stop the vehicle (the dogs will stop and move away shortly)

In the case of street dogs that you encounter regularly/in your neighbourhood

- Consider talking to them in a friendly tone (this reassures them that you are not a threat)
- Consider familiarizing them to you/your vehicle/your pet (for e.g., by talking to them, providing them with treats occasionally, or stroking them)

To stop street dogs from following or coming too close to you

- Say 'No' in a firm but gentle tone and repeatedly
- Point a long stick towards them or tap it on the ground to warn them (you don't need to hit them)
- Pretend to pick up or throw a stone at them to scare them off

Appearing calm is critical. Dogs get excited when they sense excitement in people or when they see fast-moving objects. Resident street dogs are also typically quick to stop frightening behaviours on being reassured. Consistent and regular use of these measures will extinguish undesired behaviours from resident street dogs (*towards you*) over several days.

Why do resident street dogs exhibit these behaviours? Some reasons

1. They (incorrectly) assume that all people like street dogs (e.g., following; jumping)
2. They are curious about the person (e.g., smelling; coming close without growling/barking)
3. They perceive some people as strangers (e.g., barking/growling/chasing)
4. They perceive noisy objects as threats (e.g., loud vehicle engines)
5. They are being playful and/or acting on their instincts to chase after fast-moving objects

For safe neighbourhoods

- Request neighbours and residents who are familiar with the local street dogs to get them neutered and regularly vaccinated and to practise [‘smart’ caregiving or feeding](#)
- Install well-marked speed breakers close enough to each other to prevent motorists from gathering speed. Install ‘no speeding’ signboards
- Install gates at the entry/exit points or at stairwells to prevent dogs from entering buildings
- Make arrangements for the close supervision of children during playtime in public areas
- Do not relocate or remove resident street dogs as this leads to **influx of new dogs and repeated cycles of conflict**. Maintain a stable population of neutered, vaccinated and socialised street dogs
- Become familiar with street dog behaviour and safety around street dogs and educate children about the same

Dogs that are regularly fed complete meals lose the essential street skills required to find food and to interact safely with a wide variety of people.

Differences between pet dogs and street dogs

Pet dogs remain ‘children’ for their entire lives as they are under the full control, protection, and care of their owners. Street dogs have to be ‘adults’ once they cross puppyhood. They need to be able to negotiate human society and different kinds of people on their own. Feeders are not there to protect them all the time from relocation, poisoning, or changes in the law.

Pet dogs do not necessarily have better lives than street dogs. Even with the best of human owners, they don’t have many basic freedoms: to pee or poop when they want to; to seek company when they want it and be alone when they want to; to choose their own mates and friends; to go out when they want to and to rest when they want to. They are also at the risk of abandonment and abuse.

Conversely, street dogs do not necessarily have worse lives than pet dogs. They have many freedoms that pet dogs don’t (such as those listed above). Their independence gives them much richer lives. Activities like foraging can be positive experiences.

Animals, like humans, need a wide range of experiences to have fulfilling lives. That is why zoo animals, despite having ready access to shelter and food, suffer immensely.

Strategy-problem map

Current public concerns relating to street dogs are centred around chasing, congregation, and bites, in addition to rabies. Each of these problems requires different strategies.

For rabies prevention:

Improvements in infrastructure	Education for the public & healthcare workers	Dog focused interventions
Access & availability of appropriate PEP in rural areas and small towns	Correct protocols for different wound types	Regular mass dog vaccination for rabies
Cold chain maintenance	Adherence to PEP schedules	Wildlife mass vaccination
	Importance of wound washing	

For prevention of bites, congregation, and chasing:

Measures focused on street dog caregivers & animal welfare groups	Measures focused on the general public	Measures focused on residents' associations and local animal welfare groups
Stop (after suitable weaning) regular feeding of full meals to street dogs	Mass education for adults and children about safety around street dogs	Manage environments to prevent congregation, access to private spaces, and to tackle sources of conflict like chasing
Avoid feeding street dogs at the same location and same time		Proactive conflict de-escalation , mitigation, and prevention tailored to neighbourhoods
Return to the practice of casual feeding (small quantities, different places, different times) to prevent congregation, chasing, and other risks. Casual feeding also allows street dogs to retain or relearn street skills (especially on how to avoid conflict with people).		
Proactive conflict de-escalation , mitigation, and prevention tailored to neighbourhoods		

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About the ROH-Indies project

ROH Indies combines human geography, history, behavioural ecology, and social psychology to study people-street dog interactions, dog ecology, and rabies prevention in urban and rural India, with the aim of developing concepts, strategies, and practices for healthy societies. The project is funded by the Wellcome Trust.

For more information on our outputs, team, and research:

 rohindies.org



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