

# Hawaiian Monk Seal

## Your Dog May Be Trained, But Monk Seals Are Not

### Frequently Asked Questions about Monk Seal and Dog Interactions

#### Background:

The Hawaiian monk seal is a special treasure in the Hawaiian Islands. Not only are these animals endemic or native to the islands, but they are one of the most endangered animal species in the world. There is concern that monk seals in the main Hawaiian Islands could get sick from diseases found in livestock, feral animals, humans, or even domestic pets, like dogs and cats. While the frequency of disease outbreaks may be rare, if these seals are infected, they could possibly spread the disease to the larger monk seal population in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. This would dramatically effect the monk seal population as a whole, driving them closer to extinction.

If a monk seal and your pet were to interact, the health and safety of your pet would also be of concern. Most people don't know that seals carry diseases which are communicable to dogs and transferable to humans so when people see a seal resting on the beach, it's important to consider the potential harm to themselves or their pets.

#### Q: How can diseases between my pet and monk seals be transferred?

A: The most likely scenario would be disease transfer from saliva through bites from infected animals.

#### Q: Are there any documented cases of dogs biting Hawaiian monk seals?

A: Yes. While most people don't believe their dog would ever harm a seal, it can happen. There have been documented cases of dogs biting monk seals, although in most cases there is very little information available to assess the physical damage to the seal or if the transfer of disease occurred.

#### Q: Are there any cases of Hawaiian monk seals biting dogs?

A: There have been cases in which seals have bitten dogs. Hawaiian monk seals, like any wild animal, are likely to act aggressively if they feel threatened. Seals on the beach are usually sleeping, but may defend themselves, using their sharp teeth, if surprised, approached too closely, or attacked. A dog that is merely investigating too closely may be viewed as a threat to the seal.

#### Q: What diseases could a monk seal pass on to my pet if they interacted?

A: Marine mammals, both healthy and ill, harbor a variety of bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. Pets and other animals may be susceptible to infections carried by marine mammals and vice versa.

#### Q: My dog is up to date on all of its shots, why should I be concerned about this?

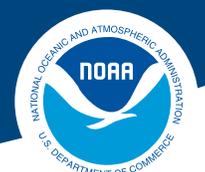
A: Although your pet may be up to date on all of its shots, there are a host of other marine mammal diseases, some of which we have yet to identify, that may be transmitted to your pet. For this reason, humans and domestic pets should avoid all contact with any wild marine mammal. Please remember that Hawaiian monk seals are protected by Federal and State laws. If your dog is off its leash and disturbs a monk seal, you may be cited in violation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and/or the Endangered Species Act.



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**Q: Where can I get more information?**

A: [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd\\_hawaiian\\_monk\\_seal.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_hawaiian_monk_seal.html)

**What you can do to help:**

- Remember – monk seals are wild animals. Keep your dogs on a leash and away from seals.
- Set an example! Even if you know your dog will not approach a seal, set an example for other pet owners and ocean users.
- Report all monk seal sightings. Call 808-220-7802

Your sighting information will help us collect important information on the seals.

**NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Regional Office**

[www.fpir.noaa.gov](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov)

**NOAA Fisheries Service, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center**

[www.pifsc.noaa.gov](http://www.pifsc.noaa.gov)