Securing equal treatment and opportunity for "pitbull" dogs

ANIMAL FARM FOUNDATION, INC.
SINCE 1985
Veterinarians are trusted experts on animals in our communities. That’s why it’s crucial that they understand the inaccuracy and unintended consequences of breed labels for dogs of unknown origins. Additionally, “pit bull” dogs and their families are often victims of discrimination. As one of the country’s most popular pets, it’s important that veterinary professionals are mindful of myths and misinformation being perpetuated about “pit bull” dogs within their offices.

Help veterinarians to better serve their clients and their clients’ pets by providing this packet of information, so that they can speak accurately on behalf of all dogs.

Along with expert research, we have included a sample letter for your convenience. Use it as template for your own personalized letter to be provided with the enclosed materials.
SAMPLE LETTER

Dear __________

I’d like to bring to your attention this packet of information from Animal Farm Foundation. Three main points are addressed which I believe to be significant to your veterinary work and as a trusted animal expert in our community:

• Many dogs of mixed breed or unknown origins are not accurately labeled. Therefore their breed labels are not reliable sources of behavioral or medical information.
• “Pit bull” is not a breed of dog. Dogs who are labeled “pit bull” are a genetically diverse group of purebred and mixed-breed dogs with a variety of individual personalities and behaviors. It is impossible to apply breed traits (regarding health or behavior) to this genetically incoherent group of dogs.
• Dogs labeled “pit bull” and their families are frequent victims of discrimination due to prejudice and perpetuated misinformation.

Since both mixed-breed dogs and dogs labeled “pit bull” are such popular family pets, I thought you and your staff might be interested to learn more.

The materials included raise important questions about the practice of labeling dogs of mixed or unknown origins. In particular, the 2012 JAVMA article “Rethinking Dog Breed Identification in Veterinary Practices”, may be helpful for your practice in terms of how new clients are labeled in your records.

Breed labels and their accuracy are a topic worthy of consideration. Labels are frequently relied upon for behavioral counseling and potential medical conditions and, in some cases, breed labels can result in serious consequences for the dogs and their families.

Every dog is an individual and should be treated fairly and without prejudice. Veterinarians are in a unique position to provide accurate, unbiased information to families who might otherwise be vulnerable to misinformation and discrimination.

Materials enclosed:
• “Rethinking Dog Breed Identification in Veterinary Practices” from the National Canine Research Council
• “Breed Specific or Looks Specific” from Kristopher Irizarry, PhD, Assistant Professor Western University
• “Dog Breed Identification” from Dr. Victoria Voith
• “Pit Bull Identification in Animal Shelters” from Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program
• “Fear vs. Fact” from Animal Farm Foundation
• “The Role of Breed in Dog Bite Risk and Prevention” from the American Veterinary Medical Association

If I can be of further assistance on this topic, I hope you will feel free to contact me at (555)555-5555 or janedoe@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time,
As far back as the 1960’s, there was clear photographic evidence that mixed breed dogs could look nothing like their purebred parents and grandparents. More recently, surveys conducted by university researchers on both coasts have shown that guesses by animal professionals, even veterinarians, as to the breed composition of mixed breed dogs of unknown origin correlate poorly with breed identification obtained from DNA analysis; and that professionals will frequently disagree with each other regarding breed composition of the same dog.

An article by two veterinarians and an attorney that appeared in the November 1, 2012 issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA) has considered the implications of these undisputed findings for veterinary practice, and recommends that veterinarians stop attempting to assign breed labels to mixed-breed dogs whose origin they do not know. The authors recommend that veterinarians will better serve their clients and their clients’ pets if they describe these mixed-breed dogs without assigning a breed, adopting a "single non-breeder based term to describe all dogs of unknown parentage."

Since most practice management software applications will store pictures, the authors further recommend that practitioners add a picture of the dog to the patient records. A picture will undoubtedly be the most reliable way to recognize a canine client.

The real-world challenge of breed-labeling for veterinarians can be seen in a breakdown of the U.S. dog population. Estimates vary as to the portion of America’s dogs that are mixed breed, but there is general agreement that it is substantial. The American Pet Products Association reports that the percentage of purebred dogs in America has fallen in the 21st century: that currently only 56% of the dog population is purebred and that 44% of the population is mixed breed. However, the same survey also reported that only 40% of dog owners interviewed said they obtained their dog from a breeder or pet store. If this is true, it suggests that far fewer than 56% of the dogs are purebred. The commonly accepted estimate is 50/50.

With the U.S. canine population hovering near or above 70 million animals, what is a veterinarian to make of the millions of dogs that will not come with reliable registration papers? Is the dog clearly a member of a breed with which the veterinarian is familiar? Did the owner obtain the dog from a breeder? Or, did he/she obtain the dog from a relative or friend who had no documentation to offer; did he/she find the dog; or did the owner simply assign a breed label because someone told him/her that the dog looked as though it was a member of that breed? The work of Scott and Fuller and the results of the university surveys mentioned above document that the general physical resemblance of a mixed breed dog to a purebred dog is by no means evidence of its
genetic relatedness to that breed of dog.

Veterinarians swear an oath to protect animal “health and welfare.”5 In terms of health, accurate breed identification may be important in anticipating medical issues for a dog and accurate identification is obtained from registration papers, actual knowledge of the dog’s parentage, or a DNA analysis.

The welfare issues are also significant, because some communities and commercial providers (e.g. insurers, airlines, landlords, etc.) discriminate against, or even forbid certain breeds or breed mixes. While stereotypes and generalizations are unfounded even when breed identification is accurate, and there is no scientific evidence to support the notion that one or more kinds of dogs is to be considered disproportionately dangerous,6 the inescapably severe consequences of discriminatory policies can also be visited on dogs who have been mislabeled, based upon an unreliable judgment of the dog’s appearance.

The two authors who are veterinarians report that they have already begun providing versions of the following short statement on their new client or new patient sheet, which describes their position regarding dogs of unknown or uncertain parentage:

“Because new scientific evidence has called into question the accuracy of visual breed identification of dogs, our hospital has adopted a policy to not identify canine patients by predominant breed unless the dog is purebred, the predominant breed of the dog’s parents is known, or the dog’s lineage has been established through the use of DNA analysis.”

We at the National Canine Research Council concur.

SOURCES & NOTES


Dr. K.J. Simpson is the founder of the Kingston Animal Hospital in Kingston, Tennessee. Dr. R.J. Simpson, also a veterinarian, is her son. Ledy VanKavage is Senior Legislative Attorney for Best Friends Animal Society, and immediate past Chair of the American Bar Association’s Tort, Trial and Insurance Practice Section’s Animal Law Committee.


5. Veterinarian oath retrieved from: https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/veterinarians-oath.aspx


www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com
The term “pit bull characteristics” and “all three bully breeds” are used as descriptions of the dogs that the breed-specific laws would apply to. However, I’m not sure what a “pit bull characteristic” is because the term pit bull does not refer to any specific breed of dog. It is ironic that legislation containing the words “breed” and “specific” define “the specific breed” as a nebulous group of three or more distinct breeds along with any other dog that might be mixed with those breeds. It is my professional opinion that this group of dogs must be the most genetically diverse dog breed on the planet. I find it paradoxical that the consensus medical and genetic view is that even one single letter difference between two people’s DNA can result in dramatic differences in behavior, susceptibility to disease and risk of adverse drug reactions, but, when it comes to man’s best friend, the exact opposite argument is made. I think these attempts to “protect society” from dangerous dogs are flawed because the inherent assumption in these laws is that anatomical and morphological characteristics in dogs correlate with certain behaviors. The genetic program that results in a large thick skull, like that of a Labrador Retriever, is not the same genetic program that builds the brain. The former regulates genes that control the cellular differentiation and anatomical patterning of cartilage, muscle and bone. The latter regulates completely different processes including the highly ordered growth of millions of different neurons that migrate and interconnect to form neuronal circuits that communicate the biochemical language of the brain.

The “science” of inferring cognitive and behavioral traits from physical properties of the head and skull (called phrenology) had been discredited in the last century (20th century). Why we would allow laws based on phrenology to be enacted in the 21st century is a question worth investigating.
COMPARISON OF ADOPTION AGENCY BREED IDENTIFICATION AND DNA BREED IDENTIFICATION OF DOGS

his study was undertaken to compare breed identification by canine adoption agencies with identification by DNA analysis of 20 dogs of unknown parentage.

BACKGROUND

Breed Specific Regulations:

- Government legislation, housing associations, landlords, and insurance companies may either prohibit ownership or impose constraints on ownership of specific breeds or mixed breeds.
- Restrictions may ban ownership, require owners to move or relinquish their dogs, require dogs to be muzzled or confined in a specific manner, and may even result in confiscation and/or euthanasia.
- Restrictions are typically worded as "any purebred X (name of breed) or dog that has any characteristics of breed X."
- Identity of the dog might be assigned by a variety of people.
- If people are unsure what breed a dog is, they are often forced to guess and ask to name "the breed the dog looks most like."

Shelter Dogs:

- The majority are mixed breeds of unknown parentage.
- It is common practice for staff to assign breed based on appearance.
- Breed identity elicits behavioral expectations and affects ease of adoption.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

40 dogs met the entrance criteria of having been adopted, being available on specific dates for photographs and blood samples, and having fully erupted canine teeth.

These dogs were placed in 4 weight categories and 5 were randomly selected from each category:
- Under 20 pounds, 21-40 pounds, 41-60 pounds, and greater than 60 pounds
- 20 dogs entered the study:
  - 12 Spayed Females; 1 Intact Female; 7 Castrated Males
  - Over 3.5 months to 12 years old

The dogs had been adopted between 2.5 months and 11.5 years prior to the study. The dogs had been adopted from different locations (shelters, rescue groups, foster housing, animal control, and similar agencies).

DNA Analysis:

MARS VETERINARY™, Lincoln, Nebraska, performed the DNA analyses and reported to have an average accuracy of 84% in first-generation crossbreds of known parentage.

All of the breeds identified by the adoption agencies were in the MARS database.

Breeds must comprise at least 12.5% of the dog's make-up to be reported.

RESULTS

See Poster Photographs and Legends. The grid behind the dogs depicts 1 foot squares.

Adopting agencies identifications:

- All dogs had been identified as mixed breeds at time of adoption
- 16 dogs had been described as a specific breed mix
- 4 dogs were only identified by a "type" (2 "shepherd" mixes and 2 "terrier" mixes)
- 1 dog had been identified by both a specific breed (Chow Chow) and a "type" (terrier)

DNA and Adoption Agency Comparison:

- Only 25% (4/16) of the dogs identified by agencies as specified breed mixes were also identified as the same predominant breeds by DNA (3 were only 12.5% of the dog's composition).
- No German Shepherd Dog ancestry was reported by DNA in the 2 dogs identified only as “shepherd mixes” by adoption agencies.
- In the 3 dogs described as terrier mixes, a terrier breed was only identified by DNA in one dog.
- In 13 of the 16 dogs, DNA analyses identified breeds as predominant that were not proposed by the adoption agencies.

DISCUSSION

- Looking at the photographs, it appears that many mixed breed dogs do not closely, if at all, resemble the predominant breeds identified by DNA.
- Mixed breed dogs may not look like their parents or grandparents.
- These results do not allow a conclusion that shelter personnel cannot identify purebreds.
- Breed identities at adoption agencies can be assigned by owners relinquishing their dogs, by anyone working or volunteering at a facility, or be based on what a puppy's mother looks like.

CONCLUSIONS

- There is little correlation between dog adoption agencies' identification of probable breed composition with the identification of breeds by DNA analysis.
- Further evaluation of the reliability and validity of visual dog breed identification is warranted.
- Standardization of current public and private policies pertaining to breed specific regulations should be reviewed.

REFERENCES


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Introduction:
Breed identification is used in dog adoption, lost and found, and regulation. In animal shelters, staff members usually assign breed according to what rehoming owners report their dogs to be or based on appearance alone since most dogs arrive without a known pedigree. Today, there is a negative public perception of pit bulls and labeling a dog as a pit bull can have a negative impact on its adoptability. Sometimes these negative impressions have resulted in bans on owning pit bulls in hopes of guarding public safety. To date, there is no universally accepted definition of a pit bull, nor is there a universally accepted method of breed identification.

Hypothesis and Objective:
Shelter staff members and veterinarians routinely make subjective breed assessments, but the reliability and repeatability of their conclusions is unknown. The objective of this study was to test the hypothesis that agreement among shelter staff members regarding identification of pit bulls would be poor and there would be poor agreement between visual breed identification and DNA breed signatures.

Methods:
In this prospective cross-sectional study, 4 staff members at 4 different shelters each recorded the suspected primary breed of 30 dogs, for a total of 144 observers and 120 dogs. In this study, we define pit bull type terrier, American Staffordshire terrier, Staffordshire bull terrier, and pit bull were included in the study definition of pit bull-type breeds. Blood was collected from each dog for DNA breed signature. Dogs were coded as "pit bull" if either an American Staffordshire terrier or Staffordshire bull terrier were identified to comprise at least 25% of the breed signature. Agreement among individual shelter staff members regarding identification of pit bulls was determined with the kappa statistic. The sensitivity and specificity of each staff member’s identification of pit bulls was compared with DNA breed as a gold standard was calculated.

Acknowledgments:
The authors wish to thank the Florida Citrus Mutual Scientific Research and the Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Programs at the University of Florida. Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program is administered by the White Tail Fund and the Maddie’s Project. The White Tail Fund granted funds for the creation of a visual aid. We thank the four animal shelters that participated in this study, Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services, the Palm Beach County, and the Jacksonville Animal Care. Finally we thank Michael Clark, Molly Tucker, Nora Sabine, and Jamie Wilson for their hard work and making this study possible.

Table 1: Examples of staff breed designations and genetic breed designations for several studies dogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dog</th>
<th>Photo</th>
<th>Staff 1</th>
<th>Staff 2</th>
<th>Staff 3</th>
<th>Staff 4</th>
<th>Vet</th>
<th>DNA breed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lab/Am. Staff</td>
<td>Am. Staff</td>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>Am. Staff</td>
<td>Pit Bull/Lab</td>
<td>Irish Water Spaniel 25%; Siberian Husky, 25%; Basil Terrier, 25%; boxer, 25%; Alaskan Malamute, 25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beagle/Lab</td>
<td>Am. Staff/ Chow</td>
<td>Bean</td>
<td>Am. Staff</td>
<td>Pit Bull</td>
<td>Irish Water Spaniel 25%; Siberian Husky, 25%; Basil Terrier, 25%; boxer, 25%; Alaskan Malamute, 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Am. Staff</td>
<td>Am. Staff Mix</td>
<td>Pit Bull</td>
<td>Am. Pit Bull</td>
<td>Am. Building, 50%; Am. Staff, 50%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Anatolian/ Dog</td>
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<td>Border Collie</td>
<td>Border Collie</td>
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<tr>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Pit Bull Mix</td>
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<td>Beaver/Lab</td>
<td>Shar-Pei/Rat Terrier</td>
<td>Chihuahua Mix</td>
<td>Chow, 25%; Am. Staff, 25%; Siberian Husky, 25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:
FEAR VS FACT

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs have “locking jaws.”

FACT: No dog, of any breed or mix, has an anatomical structure that could be a locking mechanism in their jaw.

“We found that the American Pit Bull Terriers did not have any unique mechanism that would allow these dogs to lock their jaws. There were no mechanical or morphological differences…” Dr. I. Lehr Brisbin, University of Georgia

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs have massive biting power measuring in 1,000s of pounds of pressure per square inch (PSI).

FACT: On average, all dogs bite with approximately 320 lbs of pressure per square inch. This includes dogs commonly labeled “pit bull.”

The bite pressure of a German Shepherd, an American Pit Bull Terrier and a Rottweiler were tested. The American Pit Bull Terrier had the least amount of bite pressure of the three dogs tested. Dr. Brady Barr, National Geographic

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs attack without warning.

FACT: All dogs, including dogs commonly labeled “pit bull”, signal their intent.

“Pit bulls signal like other dogs.” The institute of Animal Welfare and Behavior of the University of Veterinary Medicine, Hannover, Germany temperament tested over 1,000 dogs.

FEAR: While there are some “pit bull” dogs with good temperaments, they are the exception not the rule.

FACT: The American Temperament Test shows the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier (three pure breed dogs, typically referred to as “pit bulls”), as well as the dogs labeled “Mixed Breed”, consistently score above the average for all breeds tested, year in and year out.

The American Temperament Test Society, www.atts.org

Every dog is an individual and should be evaluated as such.

FEAR: “Pit bull” dogs are more dangerous than other dogs.

FACT: There is no scientific evidence that one kind of dog is more likely than another to injure a human being than any other kind of dog.

“…Controlled studies have not identified this breed group [pit bull-type dogs] as disproportionately dangerous.” American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)
Breeds Implicated in Serious Bite Injuries

In a range of studies, the breeds found to be highly represented in biting incidents were German Shepherd Dog, pit bull type, mixed breed, Rottweiler, Chow Chow, Jack Russell Terrier, and others (Collie, Springer Spaniel, Saint Bernard, and Labrador Retriever). If you consider only the much smaller number of cases that resulted in very severe injuries or fatalities, pit bull-type dogs are more frequently identified. However, this may relate to the popularity of the breed in the victim's community, reporting biases, and the dog's treatment by its owner (e.g., use as fighting dogs). It is worth noting that fatal dog attacks in some areas of Canada are attributed mainly to sled dogs and Siberian Huskies, presumably due to the regional prevalence of these breeds. See Table 1 for a summary of breed data related to bite injuries.

Controlled Studies

The prevalence of particular dog breeds can also change rapidly over time, often influenced by distinct peaks of popularity for specific breeds. It seems that increased popularity is sometimes followed by increases in bite reports in some large breeds. For example, there was a distinct peak in American Kennel Club registration of Rottweilers between 1990 and 1995, and they come at the top of the list of 'biting breeds' for the first time in studies of bites causing hospitalization in the late 90s and early 2000s. While it must be noted that other fad breeds such as Dalmatians and Irish setters do not seem to make similar appearances, any estimate of breed-based risk must take into account the prevalence of the breed in the population at the time and place of serious biting events.

For example, researchers may compare well-documented bite cases with matched control households. Using this method, one study found that the breeds disproportionately involved in bite injuries requiring medical attention in the Denver area (where pit bull types are not permitted) were the German Shepherd Dog and Chow Chow.

Other studies use estimates of breed prevalence that do not relate specifically to the households where the bites occurred, such as general community surveys, breed registries, licensed dogs, or animal shelter populations. These studies implicate the German Shepherd Dog and crosses and various other breeds (mixed breed, Cocker spaniel, Chow Chow, Collie, Doberman, Lhasa Apso, Rottweiler, Springer Spaniel, Shih Tsu, and Poodle).

Aggressive Breeds

Based on behavioral assessments and owner surveys, the breeds that were more aggressive towards people were small to medium-sized dogs such as the collies, toy breeds, and spaniels. For example, a survey of general veterinary clientele in Canada (specifically practices in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) identified Lhasa Apso, Springer spaniel, and Shih Tsu as more likely to bite.

While small dogs may be more aggressive their size means they are less likely to inflict serious bite injury except on vulnerable individuals or as part of a pack attack. Referrals for aggression problem more closely approximate...
the breeds implicated in serious bite attacks, probably because owners are more likely to seek treatment for aggression in dogs that are large enough to be dangerous. Larger dogs (regardless of breed) are implicated in more attacks on humans\textsuperscript{31} and other dogs.\textsuperscript{32}

Certain large breeds are notably under-represented in bite statistics such as large hounds and retrievers (e.g., Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers)\textsuperscript{28,34}—although even these breeds may have known aggressive subtypes.\textsuperscript{33} Results relating to German Shepherd Dogs are mixed,\textsuperscript{29,34} suggesting there may be particularly high variability in this breed, perhaps depending on regional subtypes or ownership factors.

**Pit Bull Types**

Owners of pit bull-type dogs deal with a strong breed stigma\textsuperscript{35} however controlled studies have not identified this breed group as disproportionately dangerous. The pit bull type is particularly ambiguous as a "breed" encompassing a range of pedigree breeds, informal types and appearances that cannot be reliably identified. Visual determination of dog breed is known to not always be reliable.\textsuperscript{36} And witnesses may be predisposed to assume that a vicious dog is of this type.

It should also be considered that the incidence of pit bull-type dogs' involvement in severe and fatal attacks may represent high prevalence in neighborhoods that present high risk to the young children who are the most common victim of severe or fatal attacks. And as owners of stigmatized breeds are more likely to have involvement in criminal and/or violent acts\textsuperscript{37}—breed correlations may have the owner's behavior as the underlying causal factor.

**Breed Bans**

While some study authors suggest limiting ownership of specific breeds might reduce injuries (e.g., pit bull type,\textsuperscript{38} German Shepherd Dog\textsuperscript{39}) it has not been demonstrated that breed-specific bans affect the rate or severity of bite injuries occurring in the community.\textsuperscript{8} Factors that are reliably associated with serious dog bite injury (requiring hospital treatment) in the United States are the victim being a young child and the dog being familiar (belonging to the family, a family friend or neighbor).\textsuperscript{40,41} Strategies known to result in decreased bite incidents include active enforcement of dog control ordinances (ticketing)\textsuperscript{42}.

**Conclusion**

Maulings by dogs can cause terrible injuries\textsuperscript{40} and death—and it is natural for those dealing with the victims to seek to address the immediate causes. Serious bites occur due to a range of factors in which a dog's size and temperament are known to be the risk factors. Also important are dog management factors such as neutering and tethering, and child care factors such as supervision around animals.

Given that pit bull-type dogs are not implicated in controlled studies, and the potential role of prevalence and management factors, it is difficult to support the targeting of this breed as a basis for dog bite prevention. If breeds are to be targeted a cluster of large breeds would be implicated including the German shepherd and shepherd crosses and other breeds that vary by location.

**See Also:**

National Animal Control Association Guideline Statement: "Dangerous and/or vicious animals should be labeled as such as a result of their actions or behavior and not because of their breed."
### SUMMARY TABLES

#### TABLE ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Top Two Breeds Identified</th>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>US Dept. Health</td>
<td>843</td>
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<td>South Africa</td>
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<td>Hospital records</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Rottweiler, Jack Russell Terrier</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2005</td>
<td>Hospital records</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>pit bull type, Rottweiler</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2005</td>
<td>Veterinary referral</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>United States (PA)</td>
<td>Springer Spaniel, German Shepherd Dog</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### TABLE TWO
Studies of Serious Dog Bite Injury by Breed taking into Account Breed Prevalence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Prevalence estimate</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Breeds Identified as Higher Risk</th>
<th>Ref</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974-1975</td>
<td>Animal control</td>
<td>Licensed dogs</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>United States (MD)</td>
<td>German Shepherd Dog and shepherd crosses Doberman Pinscher</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-1977</td>
<td>US Bases</td>
<td>Relative risk versus mixed breed</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>United States (IL, MO)</td>
<td>Collie German Shepherd Dog Cocker Spaniel</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Pediatric practice</td>
<td>Non-biting pets of other patients</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>United States (MO)</td>
<td>German Shepherd Dog and shepherd crosses mixed breed over 30lb Poodle</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1987</td>
<td>Health Unit</td>
<td>Licensed dogs</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>German Shepherd Dog mixed breed</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Plastic surgery cases</td>
<td>Prevalence in community</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>German Shepherd Dog</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Animal control</td>
<td>Case controls</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>United States (CO)</td>
<td>German Shepherd Dog Chow Chow</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1993</td>
<td>Hospital records</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Doberman Pinscher German Shepherd Dog Rottweiler</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Shelter animals</td>
<td>General shelter admissions</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>United States (WI)</td>
<td>Chow Chow Cocker Spaniel Lhasa Apso</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Owner self-report</td>
<td>Owner self-report (biters)</td>
<td>3226</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Lhasa Apso, Springer Spaniel Shih Tsu</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### References

AVSAB, a national association of veterinarians who are board-certified in the specialty of animal behavior, has just released a position statement expressing their opposition to breed-specific legislation. Their position paper notes that they are “concerned about the propensity of various communities’ reliance on breed-specific legislation as a tool to decrease the risk and incidence of dog bites to humans,” noting “that such legislation (BSL) - is ineffective, and can lead to a false sense of community safety as well as welfare concerns for dogs identified (often incorrectly) as belonging to specific breeds.”

“Dogs and owners must be evaluated individually,” the authors conclude, citing the wide range of findings across the literature regarding breeds and bite risk. And many such findings are called into question by the demonstrated unreliability of visual breed identification, particularly with regard to the estimated 46% of the US dog population that are of mixed breed ancestry.

In discussing why dogs bite, these behaviorists point out that while there are many motivations, most occur when the dog feels threatened in some way, and that uncovering the triggers specific to the individual dog and responding appropriately are key to prevention. Understanding the social needs of dogs is particularly important to bite prevention, ranging from appropriate socialization of puppies to including the dog in the family, providing daily, positive interactions with people. Dogs that are kept simply as resident on the property, without such social opportunities, are much more likely to feel threatened by humans and respond accordingly. And owners who teach their dogs, through harsh training methods, that people are indeed dangerous are more likely to evoke aggressive responses from their dogs.

The AVSAB stresses that breed alone is not predictive of the risk of aggressive behavior. Indeed, this recommendation is in line with a recent study of dog bite-related fatalities which reported that in 80.5% of cases, four or more potential risk factors were present. According to this national association of veterinarians who have specialized training in animal behavior, what does work is “responsible dog ownership and public education.” These “must be a primary focus of any dog bite prevention policy.”
The AVSAB also invites you to share this resource, “to discount common fallacies of ‘easy fixes’ that are often based on myths, and instead promote awareness that will reduce the prevalence of aggression toward people and promote better care, understanding, and welfare of our canine companions.” The full position statement can be viewed here: http://avsabonline.org/uploads/position_statements/Breed-Specific_Legislation-download-1.pdf

Updated 4 August 2014