

FINAL REPORT ON DOG BITE-RELATED FATALITIES

2018

DOG BITE-RELATED FATALITIES ARE EXCEEDINGLY RARE.

The interactions between dogs and humans are so numerous and complex that no one factor can be considered, in isolation from any other factors, to be the sole cause.

There were 38 verified dog bite-related fatalities (DBRFs) in the US in 2018.¹ They occurred within a human population of 325+ million and a canine population estimated at 75+ million.²

National Canine Research Council continues to thoroughly investigate DBRFs using the same methodology described in the comprehensive, ten-year study published December 2013 in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.³

INVESTIGATIONS TAKE TIME TO CAPTURE ACCURATE INFORMATION.

Number of fatalities:

Since January 2019, National Canine Research Council had been actively investigating 41 potential DBRFs which occurred in 2018.

These investigations have resulted in the finding that 38 of the 41 cases meet National Canine Research Council protocol to be classified as a DBRF for 2018 statistics.⁴

The majority of the 38 DBRFs were adults (60.5%), and 39.5% were children (under the age of 16).

Criminal Charges:

Criminal charges against a parent or dog owner were known to be filed in only 10.5% (n=4) of the 38 cases of DBRFs in 2018.

Breed Identification:

In only 13% (n=5) of the 38 cases of DBRFs was there any evidence of the dogs' genetics or pedigree. In all the other cases (n=33), there was no available documentation or genetic information to support an evidence-based breed identification.⁵

MULTIPLE FACTORS CONTINUE TO CO-OCCUR THAT ARE WITHIN THE CONTROL OF OWNERS.

The December 2013 study³ is the most comprehensive multifactorial study of DBRFs to be completed since the subject was first studied in the 1970’s. Covering all incidents that occurred during the ten-year period 2000-2009, it is based on investigative techniques and data developed by National Canine Research Council not previously employed in dog bite or DBRF studies.

The study reliably identified seven factors potentially within the control of dog owners and caretakers that co-occurred, in various combinations, in the overwhelming majority of DBRFs the authors examined. A follow-up report⁶ combined the findings from the 2000-2009 study with the period immediately following, 2010-2015:

Factor	Cases from 2000-2015 with this factor present
No able-bodied person being present to intervene.	86.9%
The victim having no familiar relationship with the dog(s).	83.7%
The owner failing to neuter/spay the dog(s).	77.9%
A victim’s compromised ability, whether based on age or physical condition, to manage their interactions with the dog(s).	68.7%
The owner keeping dog(s) as resident, rather than as a family pet.	70.4%
The owner’s prior mismanagement of the dog(s).	39.3%
The owner’s abuse or neglect of the dog(s).	20.6%

The study and follow-up report, as had DBRF studies published previously, found no evidence that one kind of dog is more likely to injure a human being than another kind of dog.

THESE FACTORS CO-OCCUR: THERE IS NO SINGLE FACTOR.

Four or more of the factors identified co-occurred in 75.5% of the incidents during the sixteen-year period studied. Serious and fatal dog bite incidents are complex, multifactorial events.

THE CONCLUSION OF EXPERTS: SERIOUS AND FATAL DOG BITE-RELATED INJURIES ARE MULTIFACTORIAL.

Annual reports and detailed case histories considered in isolation will not enhance awareness of what the experts have agreed on. Minor annual fluctuations in co-occurrence of owner factors, or dramatic, one-of-a-kind case histories may, in fact, obscure rather than enlighten. No single factor has been shown, in isolation from other factors, to be the sole cause of a dog bite-related injury or fatality. Professionals studying dog bite-related injuries, even when venturing speculations regarding breed, have been remarkably consistent in their recommendation of pet ownership and child safety practices directly relevant to prevention, and against regulating dogs on the basis of breed or appearance.⁷

Updated December 31, 2019.

SOURCES and NOTES:

1. See “National Canine Research Council Protocol: Definition of a DBRF”:
<https://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/injurious-dog-bites/dog-bite-related-fatalities#Definition>
2. American Veterinary Medical Association. (2018). *2017-2018 Edition. AVMA Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook. Executive Summary*. Retrieved from: <https://www.avma.org/sites/default/files/resources/AVMA-Pet-Demographics-Executive-Summary.pdf>
3. Patronek, G.J., Sacks, J.J., Delise, K.M., Cleary, D.V., & Marder, A.R. (2013). Co-occurrence of potentially preventable factors in 256 dog bite-related fatalities in the United States (2000-2009). *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 243(12), 1726-1736.
4. Cases excluded as a DBRF for 2018:
 - Three victims were found to have died from natural causes and any/all dog bites were post mortem and/or superficial.
5. Of the 33 cases where there was no available documentation or genetic information to support an evidence-based breed identification, 17 (51.5%) also had conflicting breed descriptions reported among media sources, law enforcement and animal control officials.
6. National Canine Research Council. (2018). *Update: Dog Bite-Related Fatalities in the United States, 2000-2015*. Retrieved from: https://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/sites/default/files/Update-Dog-Bite-Related-Fatalities-In-The-United-States-2000-2015_0.pdf
7. American Veterinary Medical Association. (n.d.). *Dog Bite Prevention*. Retrieved from: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/pet-owners/dog-bite-prevention>