

Pit Bulls Do Not Bite More Often

Myth: American Pit Bull Terriers bite more people per year than any other breed.

Truth: American Pit Bull Terriers do not bite people disproportionately than other breeds; nor do pit bull-type dogs.

This myth is based on a study published by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) of fatal dog attacks by breed for a 20 year period.^{1,2} The study used news media reports of breeds involved in fatal dog attacks, instead of owner identification or breed-expert identification.³ After several years of tracking media bias in dog attacks, it is widely known that non-expert identification of mixed-breed dogs or short-haired muscular dogs, is incorrect.⁴ Despite the overwhelming lack of primary sources for breed identifications in the study, local lawmakers use this study to rationalize banning pit bull-type dogs from their city.

This severe misuse of data prompted the AVMA to issue a formal letter warning that the data therein should not be used to infer breed-specific risks when enacting dangerous dog laws.⁵ Fatal attacks represent a unique “perfect storm” of factors – and do not include one single causal link such as breed or reproductive status.⁶ Similarly, enacting legislation to reduce homicide based only on the physical characteristics of convicted murderers would be meaningless and ineffective.

As a result, the the CDC does not track non-fatal dog bites (injuries) by breed, nor does it track dog-related fatalities by breed.⁷ The most serious error is that this decade-old study is being misused to infer breed-specific characteristics to define an entire population of “dangerous” dogs.

The misuse of this data to vilify and kill family pets is not only egregious, but is also outlined in a federal court case regarding breed specific legislation and has helped to call into question whether or not breed-specific bans keep people safe.⁸

¹ Sacks, J. J., L. Sinclair, J. Gilchrist, G. Golab and R. Lockwood. *Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998*, Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (Sept. 2000).

² The study was performed by investigators from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), and AVMA.

³ <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/images/dogbreeds-a.pdf>.

⁴ <http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/resources/media-myths-politics/>. See also, Reports on Dog-Bite Related Fatalities, <http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/dogbites/dog-bite-related-fatalities/>.

⁵ See attached letter.

⁶ <http://nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/dogbites/the-problems-with-dog-bite-studies/>.

⁷ <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/dog-bites/dogbite-factsheet.html>.

⁸ *Dias v. City & County of Denver*, Case No. 07-cv-00722, Order on Motion for Summary Judgment, Sept. 29, 2010, 7-13. See also <http://www.gamedogguardian.com/node/180>.



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To Whom It May Concern:

Attached, as requested, please find a copy of the report titled “Breeds of dogs involved in fatal human attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998” and published in the September 15, 2000 issue of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

In your review of this report, please be cognizant of the following:

- This study was NOT conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association, but by individual investigators from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Humane Society of the United States, and the American Veterinary Medical Association. The report underwent the standard review process required for publication of scientific reports published in the *Journal of the AVMA*.
- In contrast to what has been reported in the news media, the data contained within this report **CANNOT be used to infer any breed-specific risk** for dog bite fatalities (e.g., neither pit bull-type dogs nor Rottweilers can be said to be more “dangerous” than any other breed based on the contents of this report). To obtain such risk information it would be necessary to know the numbers of each breed currently residing in the United States. Such information is not available.
- Data in this report indicate that the number of dogs of a given breed associated with fatal human attacks varies over time, further suggesting that such data should not be used to support the inherent “dangerousness” of any particular breed. More than 25 breeds have been involved in fatal human attacks over the 20-year period summarized in this report.
- Fatal attacks represent a small proportion of dog bite injuries to humans and, therefore, should not be the primary factor driving public policy concerning dangerous dogs.
- Strategies that can be used in an effort to prevent dog bites include enforcement of generic, non-breed-specific dangerous dog laws, with an emphasis on chronically irresponsible owners; enforcement of animal control ordinances such as leash laws; prohibition of dog fighting; encouraging neutering; and school-based and adult education programs that teach pet selection strategies, pet care and responsibility, and bite prevention.

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