

Letters to the Editor

Focus on context, not breed, to prevent dog bites

We were distressed to see the recent letters to the editor^{1,2} endorsing breed-specific legislation as a solution to dog bites. Although we fully appreciate the damage any dog bite can do and have devoted no small part of our lives to preventing dog bites, we argue that breed bans will continue to put children at risk and that the focus should be on dog bite contexts, not breed.

To date, breed bans and other types of breed-specific legislation have not produced the intended results. Although hospitals in Catalonia, Spain, saw a significant decrease in hospitalizations from dog bites following changes in legal regulations on dog ownership, including breed-specific regulations,³ these results were not attributable to breed changes. As has been shown elsewhere, a study⁴ from Aragon, Spain, found that implementation of so-called dangerous animals legislation did not alter the epidemiology of dog bites in the region, and a study⁵ from the United Kingdom found that implementation of the Dangerous Dog Act had little effect on the rate of hospital visits for dog bite injuries. Combining these mixed results with findings that visual identifications of breed are frequently erroneous⁶ and that breed is frequently not reported following dog-related injuries⁷ suggests that the focus on breed in discussions of dog-bite injuries is misplaced.

Quite simply, we believe the role humans play—whether in the continuous oversight of small children or the development of dogs expressing socially acceptable behaviors—is the fulcrum around which dog bites pivot. We have previously^{8,9} recommended

an interdisciplinary, one-health approach to dog bite prevention that incorporates ongoing reliable data collection and analysis, evidence-based risk mitigation strategies, and ongoing education for children, pediatricians, and veterinary staff that respects the needs, range of normal behaviors, and developmental stages of each species. We must go beyond handouts, lectures, and one-stop prevention programs and instead bring the scientific method to bear on understanding how we live with dogs, how dogs and humans can best meet each other's needs, and how these needs change with time, culture, and situation. Only this approach can result in humane, valid solutions.

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Instructions for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Readers are invited to submit letters to the editor. Letters may not exceed 500 words and 6 references. Letters to the Editor must be original and cannot have been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Not all letters are published; all letters accepted for publication are subject to editing. Those pertaining to anything published in the *JAVMA* should be received within 1 month of the date of publication. Submission via email (JournalLetters@avma.org) or fax (847-925-9329) is encouraged; authors should give their full contact information, including address, daytime telephone number, fax number, and email address.

Letters containing defamatory, libelous, or malicious statements will not be published, nor will letters representing attacks on or attempts to demean veterinary societies or their committees or agencies. Viewpoints expressed in published letters are those of the letter writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions or policies of the AVMA.