

ABSTRACT. *Objectives.* To update data on fatal dog bites and see if past trends have continued.

Design. To merge data from vital records, the Humane Society of the United States, and searches of electronic news files.

Setting. United States.

Subjects. U.S. residents dying in the U.S. from 1989 through 1994 from dog bites.

Results. We identified 109 dog bite-related fatalities, of which 57% were less than 10 years of age. The death rate for neonates was two orders of magnitude higher than for adults and the rate for children one order of magnitude higher. Of classifiable deaths, 22% involved an unrestrained dog off the owner's property, 18% involved a restrained dog on the owner's property, and 59% involved an unrestrained dog on the owner's property. Eleven attacks involved a sleeping infant; 19 dogs involved in fatal attacks had a prior history of aggression; and 19 of 20 classifiable deaths involved an unneutered dog. Pit bulls, the most commonly reported breed, were involved in 24 deaths; the next most commonly reported breeds were rottweilers (16) and German shepherds (10).

Conclusions. The dog bite problem should be reconceptualized as a largely preventable epidemic. Breed-specific approaches to the control of dog bites do not address the issue that many breeds are involved in the problem and that most of the factors contributing to dog bites are related to the level of responsibility exercised by dog owners. To prevent dog bite-related deaths and injuries, we recommend public education about responsible dog ownership and dog bite prevention, stronger animal control laws, better resources for enforcement of these laws, and better reporting of bites. Anticipatory guidance by pediatric health care providers should address dog bite prevention. *Pediatrics* 1996;97:891-895; *dog bites, children, injury.*

ABBREVIATIONS. DBRFs, dog bite-related fatalities; MCMTs, multiple-cause mortality tapes; NCHS, National Center for Health Statistics; HSUS, Humane Society of the United States.
