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# *Animal Attacks/Bites: Keeping Denver Safe*

January 7, 2026

**Protect, Improve & Promote the Health & Environment of Denver**

# Animal Attacks or Bites

An owner is **legally responsible** if their animal **attacks or bites**:

- A person or domestic animal **off their property**
- A person or domestic animal **on their property** or in a business not open to the public, unless:
  - The area is clearly posted with warning signs
  - The animal is securely confined indoors or in a secure enclosure
- A person or domestic animal **in a business open to the public**

*DRMC Sec. 8-61*

# National Dog Bite Statistics



Canines bite 4.5 million people in the U.S. per year



900,000 (20%) need medical attention



Half are kids



Average 30-50 fatalities per year

# Dr. Ian Dunbar Bite Scale

Level 1

- Obnoxious or aggressive behavior but no skin-contact by teeth.

Level 2

- Skin-contact by teeth but no skin-puncture.

Level 3

- 1 to 4 punctures from a single bite with no puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth.

Level 4

- 1 to 4 punctures from a single bite with at least one puncture deeper than half the length of the dog's canine teeth.

Level 5

- Multiple-bite incident with at least two Level 4 bites or multiple-attack incident with at least one Level 4 bite in each.

Level 6

- Fatal. Victim dies from injuries.

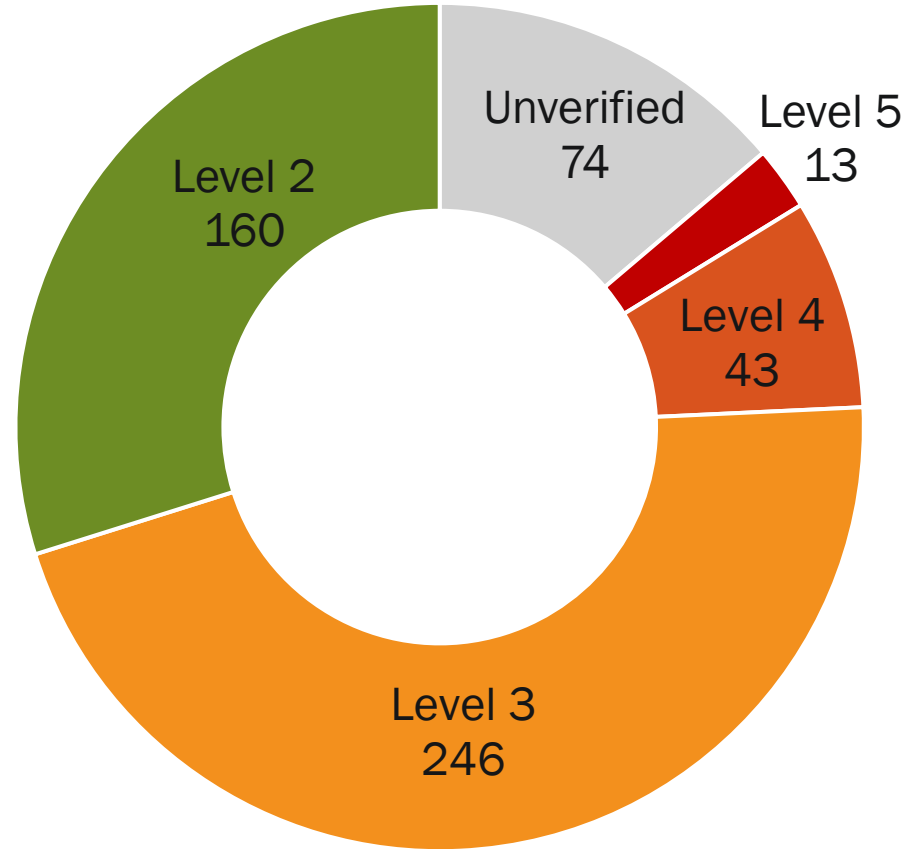
# WARNING GRAPHIC IMAGES

(Example Photos To Be Shared In-Person)

# Denver Bite Data

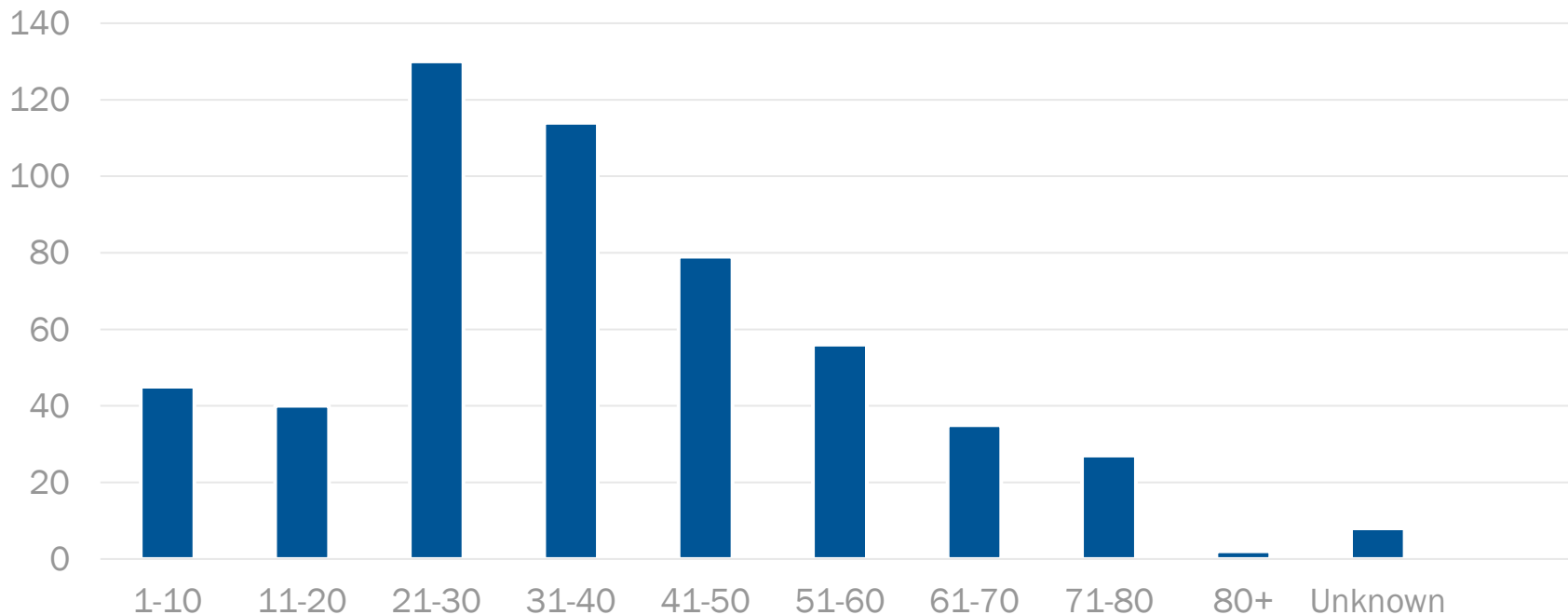
Severity Level

October 2024-October 2025



# Denver Bite Data: Victim's Age

October 2024 - October 2025



# Dr. Dunbar's Recommendations

Level 3: Prognosis is fair to good **if the owner complies with behavior management** for the duration of the dog's life. Rigorous bite-inhibition exercises are essential.

Level 4: The dog has **insufficient bite inhibition** and is **very dangerous**.

Prognosis is poor because of the difficulty and danger of trying to **teach bite inhibition to an adult hard-biting dog**.

- Dog is **expected to bite again**
- Dog should be confined to the **home at all times** and only allowed contact with adult owners
- Dog should be placed in **secured confinement** when children or guests are visiting
- Dog should be **leashed and muzzled** when leaving the house

Levels 5 and 6: The dog is **extremely dangerous** and mutilates. The dog is simply **not safe around people**. Euthanasia recommended.





# Enforcing Dangerous Animal Ordinances


**Protect, Improve & Promote the Health & Environment of Denver**

# What is a Dangerous Animal?

## Potentially Dangerous Animal

An animal is considered potentially dangerous if it:

- Causes bodily injury (less than serious)
- Menaces or threatens someone without provocation while off the owner's property
- Attacks someone lawfully on the owner's property


 Must have a Potentially Dangerous Animal Permit

 May request removal of designation after 36 months without violations

## Dangerous Animal

An animal is considered dangerous if it:

- Causes **serious bodily injury**
- Was declared potentially dangerous and the owner violated court orders
- Was declared potentially dangerous and later engaged in threatening or harmful behavior again

 Illegal to own a dangerous animal in Denver

*DRMC Sec. 8-62 & 8-63*

# Denver's Approach to Dangerous Dogs

**Denver has current effective legislation & policies to identify and manage dangerous dogs**

## **"Animal of Concern"**

- Proactive response
- Identifies concerning behavior
- Suggest corrective steps for owner
- Voluntary, non-criminal process

## **Potentially Dangerous Animals**

- Required to have a permit
- Permit must be maintained for 36 months
- DAP can enact strict conditions in the permit

## **Dangerous Animals**

Not permitted to reside within the City and County of Denver

# Enforcement

## Denver Animal Protection

**Goal:** Consistent, fair enforcement using available tools

- Focus on behavior change, not permanent separation.
- Consider the facts:
  - Attack on pet or person
  - Level of injury
  - Circumstances of incident/ prior history

**Approach:** Ensure community safety

- Use voluntary compliance where possible
- Resolve at lowest level
- Apply standardized investigation guide

## CAO

**Goals:**

- Ensure community safety
- Seek behavior change
- Seek more responsible ownership

**Approaches:**

- Work closely with DAP
  - Subject matter experts
  - More familiar with history of owners/animals
- Seek restitution for victims
- Craft case resolutions geared toward education and behavior change rather than punishment

# Maintaining the Human Animal Bond

- ✓ Protecting animals
- ✓ Keeping pets and people together, when possible



# Community Engagement Efforts

## Clinical Services



Pay to Spay  
Free vaccines and microchips  
Free spay/neuter  
Offsite clinics (including AIMH)  
Low-cost clinics 2X per week

## Food & Supplies



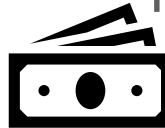
Pet Pantry  
Pet Retention Program - help pet owners with behavior training and veterinary care (beginning in 2026)

## Humane Education



Community presentations: dog bites, animal handling, preventative vet care

## Funding

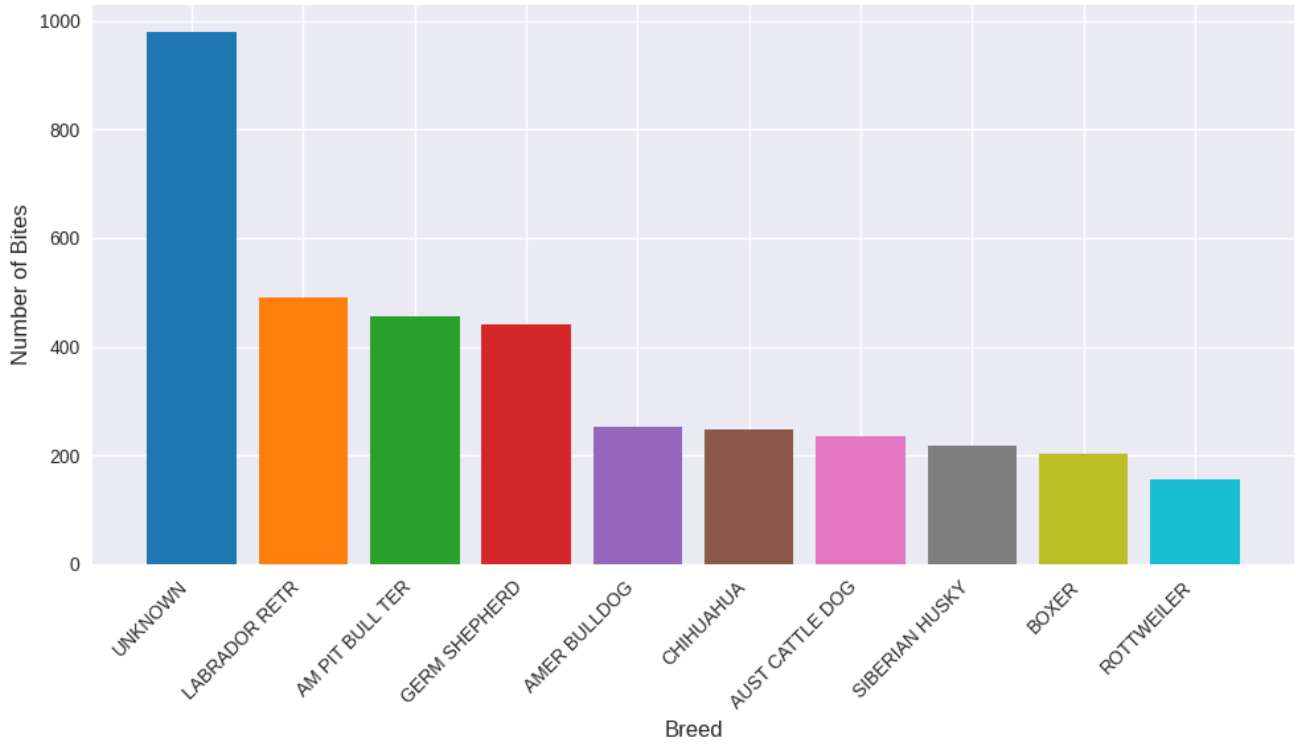


Grant & donor-funded

# Dog Breeds & Behavior

**Empowering Denver's communities to live better, longer**

# Top Biting Breeds (2020-2025)





# Breed Identification & Behavior

## Breed Identification Is Unreliable

- There is no consistent or accurate method to determine a dog's breed, especially in mixed breeds
- Breed determination is often vague, subjective, and based on appearance

## Behavior Is What Matters

- Dangerous behavior can be consistently and accurately identified, unlike breed

## Breed ≠ Personality

- A dog's temperament and behavior vary widely, even within the same breed
- Breed alone is not a reliable predictor of aggression or safety risk

# From the Experts:



2022 study in **Journal Science**: While at least 80% of physical traits can be tied to DNA, **only 9% of personality traits are linked to a dog's breed**

“Targeting a specific breed may be unproductive; a more effective approach may be to target chronically irresponsible dog owners.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Why Behavior-Based Laws Work Better

- ✓ **Focus on Behavior**

Targets actual aggression or biting, not appearance

- ✓ **Owner Accountability**

Holds owners responsible for their dog's actions

- ✓ **Easier to Enforce**

Relies on clear, documented behavior, not subjective breed ID

- ✓ **Improves Public Safety**

Addresses real risks and promotes responsible ownership

# Questions?

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