



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:

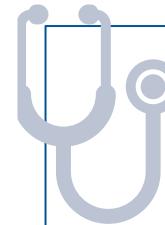
- A person or domestic animal **off their property**
- A person or domestic animal **on their property or in a business not open to the public**, unless:
 - The area is clearly posted with warning signs
 - The animal is securely confined indoors or in a secure enclosure
- A person or domestic animal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



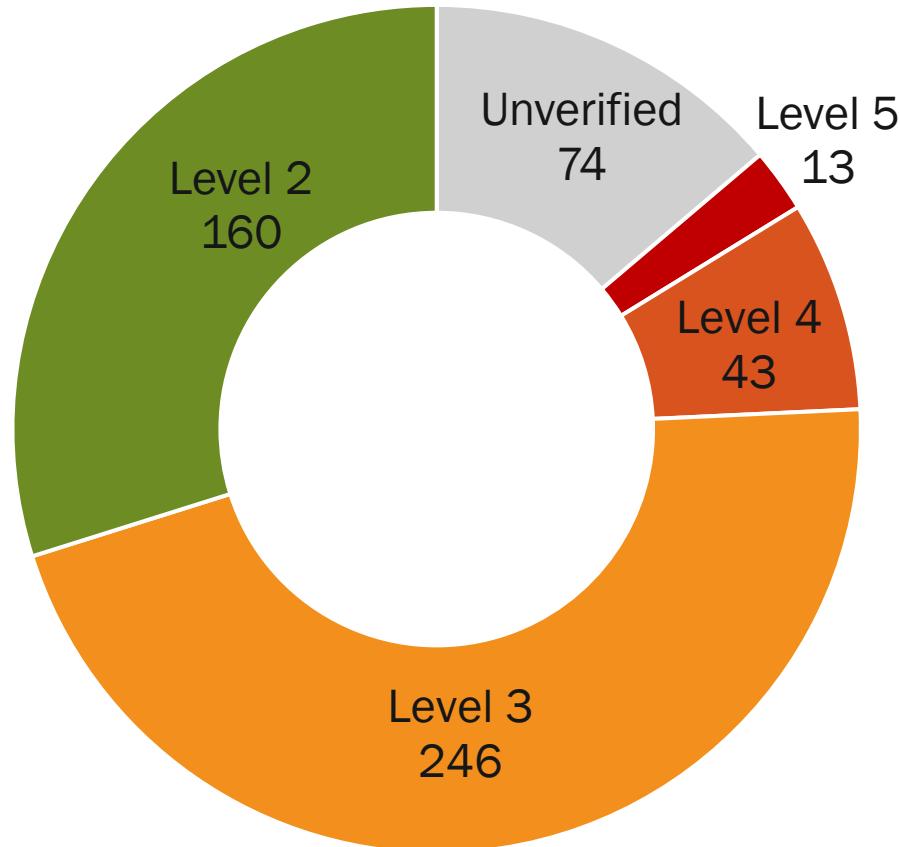
WARNING GRAPHIC IMAGES

(Example Photos To Be Shared In-Person)

Denver Bite Data

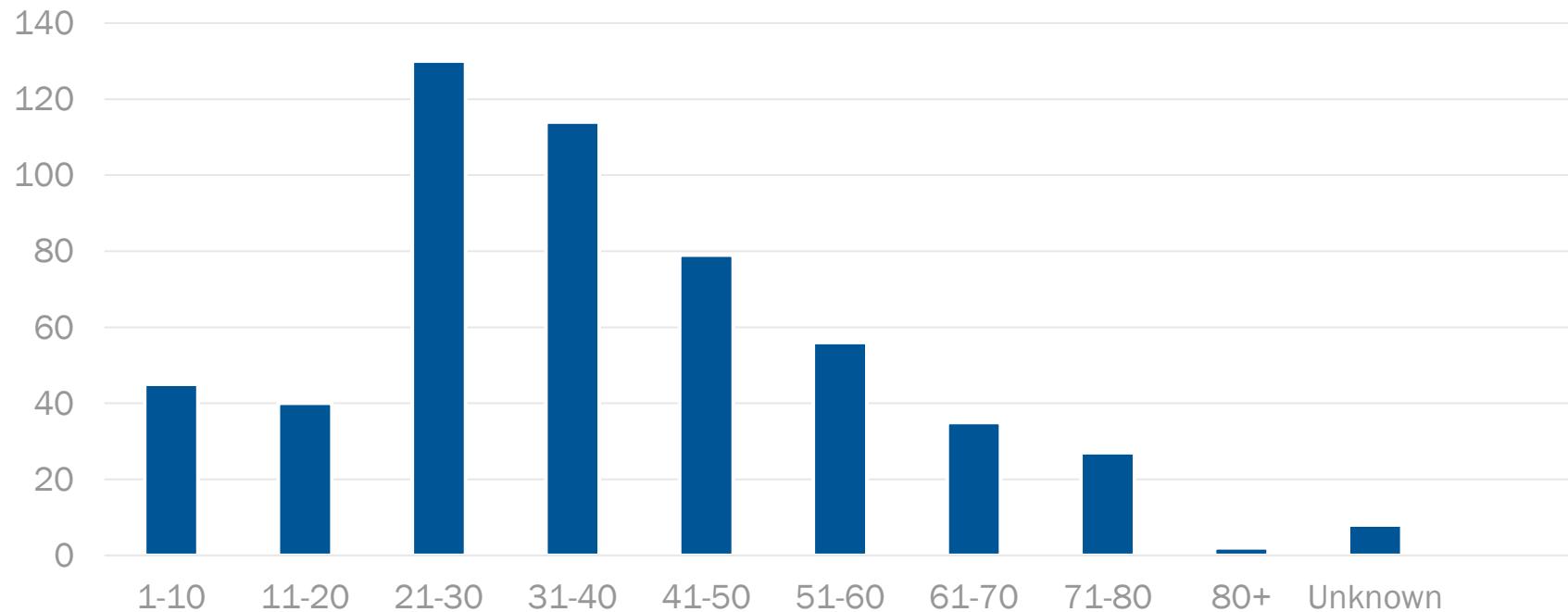
Severity Level

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

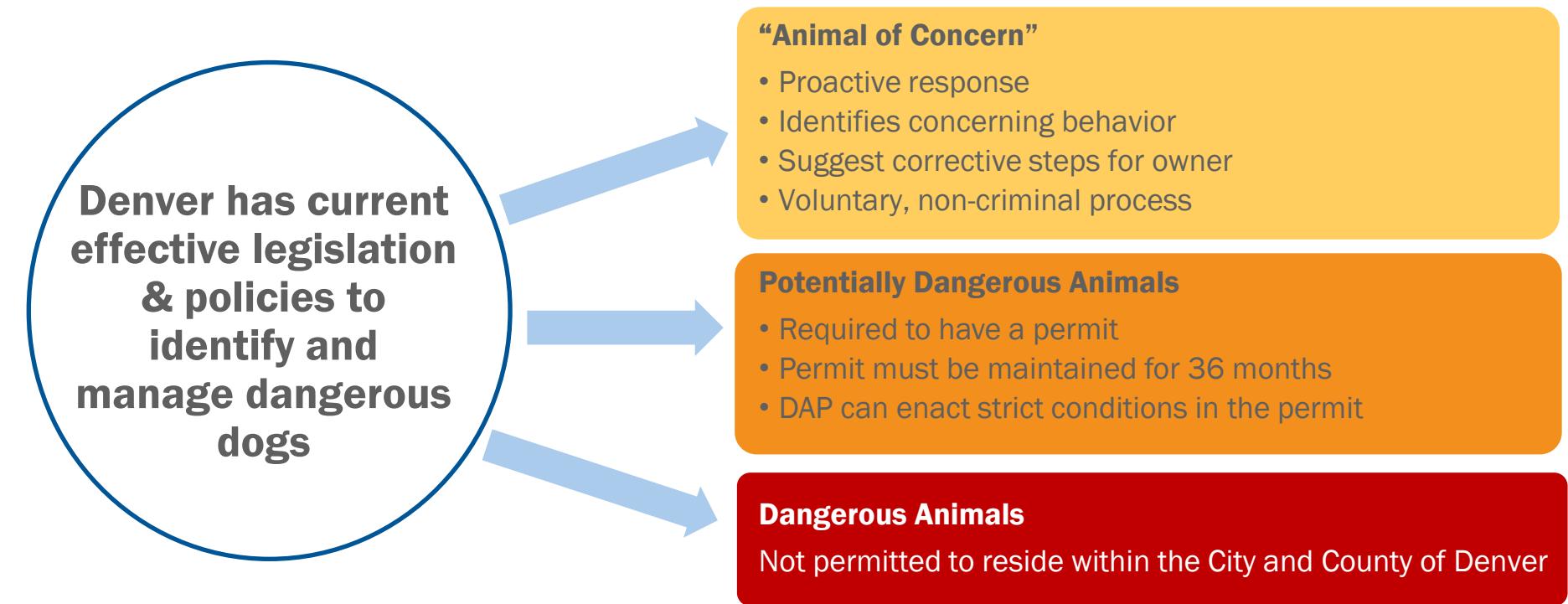
An animal is considered dangerous if it:

- 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



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

Humane Education



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

Food & Supplies



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

Funding

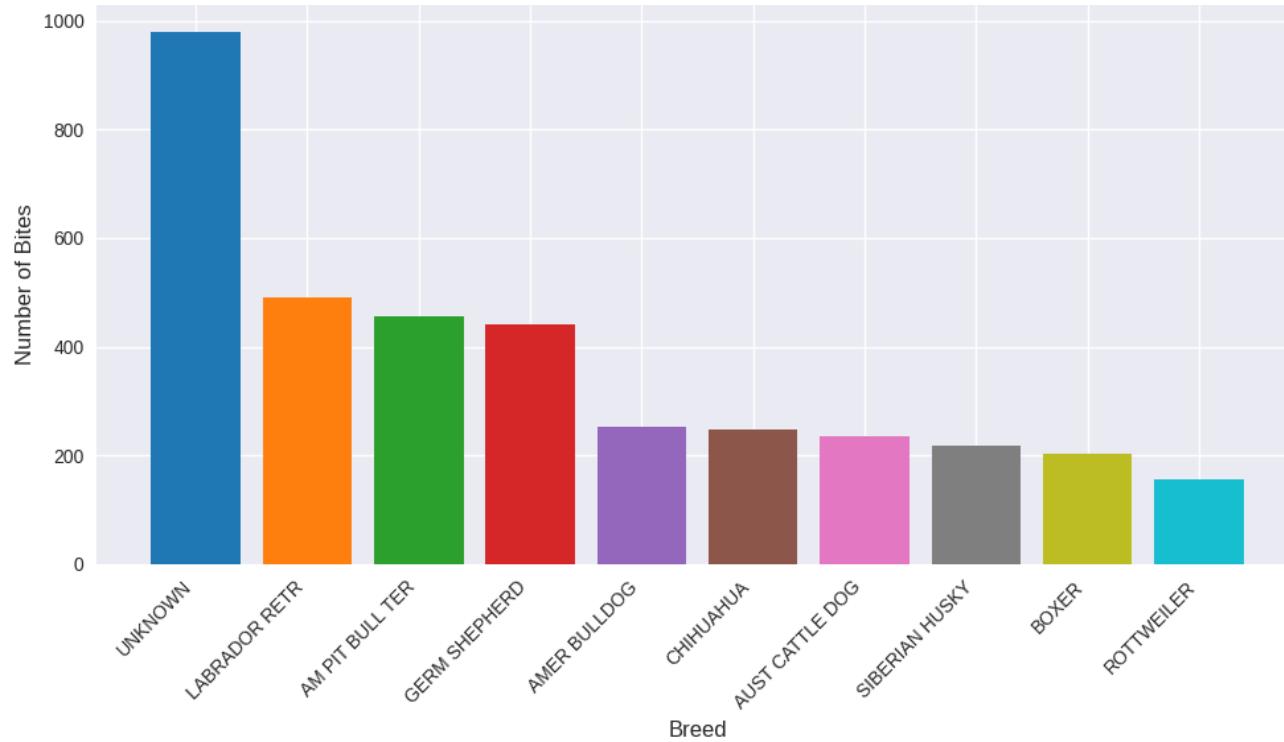


- Grant & donor-funded

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?

Melanie Sobel

Director, Denver Animal Protection

Melanie.sobel@denvergov.org

Josh Rolfe

Lieutenant, Denver Animal Protection

Joshua.rolfe@denvergov.org