

Which Dogs Are Most Dangerous?
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Recent highly publicized attacks by wolf hybrids have raised the issue of the safety of these animals. Statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that pit bull terriers, Rottweilers, German shepherds, Siberian huskies, Alaskan malamutes and wolf hybrids were involved in 129 of the 177 fatal attacks on people in the U.S. from 1979 to 1994. Does the fact that only six kinds of dogs accounted for 73% of the fatalities mean that some breeds are inherently more dangerous than others? Not necessarily.

Although genetic factors clearly influence aggressiveness, an animal's tendency to show aggression is the outcome of complex interactions between genes and the environment. Biological factors other than genetic temperament such as age, sex, reproductive status (neutered vs. intact) and general health are known to influence aggressiveness.

How an animal is raised, socialized to other animals and people, trained and supervised also have an affect. Even the setting of the attack such as whether it is on the animal's territory or some place else as well as the behavior of the victim can influence whether or not a dog will bite in a particular situation. Given the large number of factors that can influence dog aggression, it is an over simplification to simply blame the animal because of its breed identity.

There are many Rottweilers (or pit-bulls or wolf hybrids) that have been good family pets with no signs of aggression. Most authorities agree that outlawing specific breeds will not stop the injuries and deaths. A reduction in dog bites will only come from more responsible pet ownership.

Dr. Randy Lockwood, a behavior specialist on dangerous dogs with the Humane Society of the United States, has proposed several steps to achieve a reduction in dog bites. These include strengthening laws against dog fighting and irresponsible use of guard and attack dogs; eliminating "puppy mills" which produce poorly socialized dogs with inferior genetic temperaments; better education of owners and breeders about the proper breeding, socialization, training and supervision of animals; educating the general public, especially children, on how to recognize the signs of threat and aggression in dogs and the situations that often lead to aggression, and finally developing and enforcing laws which make owners ultimately responsible for the actions of their dogs.