

Adult hospital admissions for dog bites triple in 20 years

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A new study by the University of Liverpool reveals adult hospital admissions for dog bites tripled in England between 1998-2018.

Published today in *Scientific Reports*, it is the most in-depth epidemiological study of [dog bites](#) in England to date and highlights the urgent need to tackle this growing public health problem.

The researchers looked at the incidence and socio-demographics of patients admitted to English NHS hospitals for dog bites between 1998-2018 and estimated their annual direct health care costs.

Across all ages, annual hospital [admission](#) rates rose from six to 15 per 100,000 people, equating to more than 8,000 admissions in 2018.

While children aged 14 years or under made up around 25% of all admissions, their incidence rate remained relatively stable and showed no obvious annual trend (averaging 14 admissions per 100,000 people a year). In contrast, the rates in adults tripled from five to 15 admissions per 100,000 people, with the biggest increase seen in

women between the ages of 35-64.

Average rates also varied hugely between different local authorities, with the highest incidence of bites found in the most deprived neighborhoods. Additionally, admission rates were found to be higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Knowsley in Merseyside had the highest incidence with 24 admissions per 100,000 people, while the City of London had the lowest incidence at just one admission per 100,000 people.

Direct health care costs to the NHS also increased and peaked in the financial year 2017/2018 at an estimated £71 million (£25.1 million in hospital admissions and £45.7 million in A&E attendance).

Lead author Dr. John Tulloch, an epidemiologist at the University of Liverpool, said: "Despite sustained education and preventative campaigns across large parts of society, the issue of dog bites continues to grow and is a huge public health issue.

"Dogs provide large benefits to society, especially in these difficult times where they can provide great companionship. However, working and living with animals can pose an injury risk. Our study presents just the tip of the iceberg, as it only includes injuries severe enough to require hospital admission."

The researchers say that further work is needed to define what is driving the increase in dog bites in England, and specifically in adults, to enable the development of appropriate prevention strategies.

Until now, dog [bite](#) prevention strategies have mainly focused on high-risk groups, such as children and those that encounter [dogs](#) through their work, such as postal workers, however different strategies may be needed to tackle the rise in adults.

Dog behavior expert Dr. Carri Westgarth, from the University of Liverpool, said: "It is important to

remember that any dog can bite regardless of how well you know the dog, and most bites will occur in the owner's home.

"As we spend even more time with our dogs during lockdown we should ensure that we give dogs their own safe space to be alone, give them plenty of exercise and mental stimulation, and when your dog wants to be left alone leave them be.

"Dog bites to children can be very severe so ensure that you observe children and dogs closely and intervene when necessary. Dogs do not want to bite you, it is a last resort response for them, so watch out for any warning signs of them being uncomfortable in a situation and remove yourselves, or them, from it."

More information: John S. P. Tulloch et al. English hospital episode data analysis (1998–2018) reveal that the rise in dog bite hospital admissions is driven by adult cases, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-81527-7](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-81527-7)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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