

Pit Bull Myths Debunked!

Myth: Pit bulls were bred to be aggressive

Truth: The term “pit bull” today in many cases is nothing more than a descriptive umbrella term for a dog’s general appearance- a medium size, short coated dog with a blockier head. This appearance can come from over 20 breeds of dogs (and various mixes of those with other breeds too).

While a “pit bull” can mean the American Pit Bull Terrier, or the American Staffordshire Terrier, or the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, a mixed dog that has some of the same physical appearances of these breeds (like boxers, mastiffs, rottweilers, etc) is typically also labeled a “pit bull.” We’re talking about a huge number of different dog breeds in all kinds of combinations!

What’s more? NO gene for general canine aggression has been found (researchers have looked!) and there is likewise no such thing as a “latent” gene that would give a dog a propensity to “attack at any time” like some anti-pit bull groups would have people believe. While some traits, like herding, retrieving, and work drive can be inherent in certain breeds, aggression is not one of those things- scientific research tells us this!

Bottom line: When we talk about pit bulls, we largely aren’t talking about purposefully bred, purebred dogs with a pedigree. We are talking about mixed breed dogs, begotten from mixed breed dogs’ unintentional litters. The 480,000 “pit bulls” euthanized in US shelters each year.

The genetic diversity in this group of dogs is ENORMOUS, and comparing each is like comparing apples and oranges. The claim that this huge group of mixed DNA dogs has been bred with a purpose to carry on a single gene or is somehow “hardwired” to attack people is ludicrous!

Myth: Pit bulls have 2000psi jaw strength

Truth: Research studies have thoroughly disproven this myth. The bottom line is this: pit bull type dogs have the SAME strength in their jaws as any dog of a similar size. National Geographic conducted a study in 2005 comparing the bite strength of a German Shepherd, a Rottweiler, and an American Pit Bull Terrier. The Pit Bull actually registered lower in this test than the other two breeds at 127psi.

A more recent study published in Journal of Anatomy in 2009 showed that the larger the animal, the stronger its bite strength (makes intuitive sense, right?). The mastiff, one of the largest breeds of dog, measured the highest of all dogs in this study.

Myth: Pit bulls attack more than other dogs

Truth: Since 1998, no centralized, accredited agency tracks breeds of dogs involved in dog bite related fatalities. The CDC discontinued this data collection finding it to be “of no discernable value” because ANY dog has the ability to bite. The CDC found there was no reliable way to collect dog breeds in reported incidents due to inconsistency in reports from witnesses, law enforcement, owners, etc with each incident, and without a DNA test, there is no reliable way to collect and report this data. Without validity and reliability measures, those kinds of numbers give us no real information!

Dog bite related incidents occur across the breed spectrum (and remember, “pit bull” is a group, not a breed- so there are MORE MEMBERS because it includes various mixes from 20+ breeds!)

Any website or group that purports to collect data as it relates to dog breeds and bite related fatalities is NOT collecting scientifically valid or reliable numbers. Scouring media reports, police scanners, and other such methods they use in no way lends to complete or thorough numbers and should not be presented as factual evidence.

Example: a study by the National Canine Research Council found that a single incident involving a pit bull type dog was reported in the media **230 times more** than a similar incident involving a labrador!

Beware of groups that try to incite fear with inflated, invalid, and unscientific numbers and know the real FACTS!

Myth: Pit bulls lock their jaws

Truth: Pit bull type dogs have jaws with the same physiologic structure and make-up as all other dogs. There is no such thing as a “jaw locking mechanism” in any dog.

Myth: Breed-Specific Legislation (BSL) keeps communities safe

Truth: Extensive research over the last 30 years has shown that cities with BSL do not have fewer dog bite related incidents. Cities who have repealed existing BSL likewise do NOT experience an increase in dog bite related incidents once pit bull type dogs are allowed in their city limits.

In fact, research suggests BSL may give residents a false sense of security when in reality ANY dog can bite provided the correct circumstances. By and large, the MOST EFFECTIVE policy is BREED-NEUTRAL dangerous dog laws- which apply to ALL dogs, regardless of appearance. This allows dogs to be judged by their individual behavior, not a subjective and ill-defined test of appearance. We KNOW physical appearance is NOT predictive of an individual’s behavior!

BSL has been shown to be so ineffective at improving public safety (and in fact costs taxpayer resources to enforce with NO benefit to the community), **many** national, accredited, and reputable organizations have spoken out against it.

Bottom line?

“Pit bulls” are a large group of dogs, made up of many different breeds- it’s not a single type of dog. There is no gene for aggression in dogs that can be selectively bred, nor are pit bull type dogs any different physiologically from any other dog of a similar size.

Pit bulls have gotten an undeserved, unwarranted, and unfounded reputation in the last 20-30 years, which has repeatedly be debunked in many scientific studies. So much so that there is an extensive list of reputable, national organizations that advocate AGAINST discrimination of these- or any- dogs.

Here’s the take-away message: DOGS ARE DOGS. Regardless of their breed(s). Regardless of their physical appearance. Dogs each have a unique, individual personality and various life experiences. Dogs need to be treated as such, not lumped together in a poorly defined, subjective umbrella term that has shown time and again to serve no real purpose in promoting any kind of public safety within cities that ban them.