

# Veterinary: Urgent action needed on English Bulldog breeding

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English Bulldogs must be bred with more moderate physical features, as a new study reports that the breed is significantly less healthy than other dog breeds. English Bulldogs are at increased risk of breathing, eye, and

skin conditions due to their extreme physical features, including shortened muzzles, folded skin, and a squat body, reports the paper published in the journal *Canine Medicine and Genetics*. The authors advocate that the English Bulldog breed standards should be redefined towards more moderate characteristics, without which there may be a risk that the breeding of this type of dog is banned in the UK.

The English Bulldog was originally developed as a muscular and athletic dog for bull-fighting, but over the years has been bred to be a show and companion [breed](#) with a short (brachycephalic) skull, protruding jaw, skin folds, and squat, heavy build. This physique has been linked to several [health conditions](#), and countries such as the Netherlands and Norway have restricted the breeding of English Bulldogs in recent years.

Authors from the Royal Veterinary College (Hertfordshire, England) compared the risks of common disorders in English Bulldogs to other dogs by analyzing records from veterinary practices across the UK from 2016 using the VetCompass database.

Dan O'Neill and colleagues assessed the records of a random sample of 2,662 English Bulldogs and 22,039 dogs that were not English Bulldogs, and found that English Bulldogs were twice as likely to be diagnosed with at least one disorder than other dogs. The breed showed predispositions for 24 out of 43 (55.8%) specific disorders.

English Bulldogs were at 38.12 times greater risk of developing skin fold dermatitis than other dogs. They were also at 26.79 times greater risk of developing an eye condition called prolapsed nictitating membrane gland (also called 'cherry eye'), where the dog's third eyelid protrudes as a red swollen mass in the lower eye. English bulldogs were also at 24.32 times greater risk of mandibular prognathism (where the [lower jaw](#) is too long relative to the [upper jaw](#)), and 19.20 times at risk of brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (which can lead to severe breathing

problems) compared to other dogs.

In contrast, English Bulldogs were at reduced risk of some conditions such as dental disease, heart murmur, and flea infestation compared to other dogs.

The authors also report that only 9.7% of English Bulldogs in this study were aged over eight years old compared to 25.4% of other [dog breeds](#). This supports the view that a shorter lifespan in English Bulldogs is linked to their poorer overall health, suggest the authors.

Study author Dan O'Neill said: "These findings suggest that the overall health of the English Bulldog is much lower than that of other dogs. However, what is most concerning is that so many of the health conditions that English Bulldogs suffer from, such as skin fold dermatitis and breathing problems, are directly linked to the extreme structure of their bodies that has been selectively bred for.

"Given the continued popularity of the breed, the body-shape of the typical pet English Bulldogs should be redefined towards more moderate physical characteristics. Doing so will not only improve the dogs' health, but could also enable the UK to avoid following other countries in banning the English Bulldog on welfare grounds."

The authors suggest that future research could compare the predisposition of disorders between English Bulldogs with more moderate physical features compared to those with extreme physiques in order to assess potential welfare gains from breeding for less drastic characteristics.

**More information:** Dan O'Neill, English Bulldogs in the UK: a VetCompass study of their disorder predispositions and protections, *Canine Medicine and Genetics* (2022). [DOI:](#)

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