

Mixed-breeds, Labradors and Jack Russell terriers are the most common UK dog breeds, analysis finds

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The study could help scientists, breeders, veterinarians, owners, and future owners make decisions that prioritize dog health. Credit: Shridhar Dixit, Unsplash, CC0 (creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/)

An analysis of more than 2 million pet dogs living in the UK in 2019 has identified the most common overall breeds—topped by mixed-breeds, Labrador retrievers, and Jack Russell terriers—while also highlighting the popularity of breeds with physical features associated with increased health risks.

Dan O'Neill of the Royal Veterinary College, UK, and colleagues present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on July 26, 2023.

In 2022, 31% of UK households reported owning a pet dog, making dogs the most popular pet in the country. Understanding the demographics of the UK pet dog population—including breed, sex, and [physical characteristics](#)—is necessary to inform efforts to optimize the health of the dog population by helping prospective owners choose breeds less likely to have issues related to extreme body shape. However, until recently, good-quality, comprehensive demographic data for UK dogs overall has been lacking.

Since 2010, 30% of UK veterinary clinics have shared anonymized pet demographic and health data on over 25 million animals through a program at the Royal Veterinary College called VetCompass, giving researchers access to more comprehensive dog data. To gain a clearer picture of UK dog demographics, O'Neill and colleagues analyzed data from all 2,237,105 dogs under the care of UK veterinary clinics that participated in VetCompass in 2019.

The analysis revealed that 69.4% of the dogs were purebred, 6.7% were designer-crossbred (for instance, cockapoos or labradoodles), and 24% were mixed-breed. The most common breeds overall were mixed-breed, Labrador retrievers, and Jack Russell Terriers. Among puppies less than one year old, the most common breeds were mixed-[breed](#), French bulldogs, and cockapoos. Male dogs were slightly more common than female dogs overall.

Taking a closer look at physical characteristics, the researchers found that 17.6% of the dogs in this study represented breeds—such as pugs, French bulldogs, and English bulldogs—with brachycephaly a flattened skull shape associated with an increased risk of compromised health. The authors predict a future canine health care "crisis" in the UK as dogs with brachycephaly and other "extreme" physical characteristics continue to increase in number and age, exacerbating the adverse effects from these extreme body shapes.

Overall, these findings could help scientists, breeders, veterinarians, owners, and future owners make better decisions that prioritize dog health.

Dr. Dan O'Neill adds, "With 800 dog breeds available in the UK, this VetCompass study shows there are more than enough healthy breeds to choose from that do not suffer from extreme body shapes such as flat faces, skin folds or absent tails."

"Despite this, many UK owners are still persuaded by social influences and trends into acquiring dogs with extreme body shapes that are likely to result in serious health issues during much of their dogs' lives. The advice is to stop and think before buying a dog with an extreme body shape."

More information: O'Neill DG, McMillan KM, Church DB, Brodbelt DC, Dog breeds and conformations in the UK in 2019: VetCompass canine demography and some consequent welfare implications, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0288081](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288081) , [journals.plos.org/plosone/arti ... journal.pone.0288081](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0288081)

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