

# UK government urged to tackle 'killer' XL bully dogs

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Credit: Luis Negrón from Pexels

The UK government is facing calls to crack down on the backyard breeders of XL bully dogs, and even to cull the breed, following a string of horrifying attacks.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has pledged to ban the [dogs](#) but stopped short of saying they should be euthanised.

The dogs, which have huge, powerful jaws and can weigh over 60 kilograms (132 pounds), have risen in popularity since the Covid-19 lockdowns, which saw dog ownership rise.

"These dogs would appear to be valued by some as status symbols prized for their aggressive temperament. We will not tolerate this any longer," wrote environment minister Therese Coffey last month after the ban was announced.

That followed a viral clip of an out-of-control XL bully biting an 11-year-old girl, leaving her traumatized and in need of hospital treatment.

The rampaging dog then chases and attacks one of the men who had gone to her aid in the central English city of Birmingham.

Under Sunak's plan, owners will have to register their dogs and muzzle them in public places.

They will also be required to neuter them so that the dog type dies out within a decade.

But Conservative party lawmaker Robert Goodwill has said the government should be considering faster action, including a "general cull".

Others are calling for a crackdown on unscrupulous breeders.

Since the Birmingham attack on September 9, there have reportedly been at least four more attacks by XLs—two of them fatal and another involving a toddler.

## 'Fighting stock'

Lawrence Newport, a researcher at Royal Holloway University of London who has spearheaded efforts to get the dogs banned, says they are uniquely aggressive due to their breeding history.

"These are fighting dogs, originally bred from fighting stock," he said.

XL bully type dogs were now responsible for 70 percent of dog attacks in the UK even though they only made up one percent of all dogs, he said.

If attacks were caused by bad owners, rather than something inherently dangerous about the dog type, there would be more attacks involving other big breeds, he argued.

Others, however, said fixating on one dog type would not solve the problem of underground breeders who would simply move on to other dangerous breeds.

"As soon as something becomes popular, the wrong people get involved and all this cross-breeding and inbreeding starts to create problems," dog safety campaigner Mark Riley, who helps run the group Rocky's Army, told AFP.

"It's happening with other breeds as well so it's not just the XL bully.

"We've heard stories of people crossing rottweilers with other dogs. They're the kind of people that need dealing with."

Riley's group supports people who have had their dogs seized by police under the Dangerous Dogs Act and advocates responsible ownership programs and licenses for dog owners.

Under the law, introduced in 1991, it is illegal to own four types of dog without an exemption, including pit bull terriers and Japanese tosas. Breeding the dogs is also banned.

## 'The Beast'

The owner of one XL bully told AFP he accepted the dogs looked "pretty big and intimidating" but stressed that "any dog can turn violent" if not handled correctly.

The 30-year-old private ambulance driver from London, who gave his name as Jack said, he had trained his two-year-old dog Frank Sinatra to ensure he was obedient and well behaved.

"These dogs, they crave a lot of attention and you can see that sometimes people don't give them that attention. It's down to ownership," he said.

"They are great dogs. They're great loving family dogs. I trust him around my daughter."

According to the Bullywatch website, XL bully, bully type or crossbreed dogs now accounted for the majority of UK dog attacks.

The group, which aims raise awareness of the scale of dog [attacks](#) linked to XL bullies, said it believed there had been 11 confirmed deaths since 2021 and three more suspected deaths.

The general rise in dog attack fatalities in the UK "can be explained directly" by the introduction in recent years of XL bully type dogs, it said.

The mother of a 10-year-old boy who was killed by an XL [bully](#) named 'The Beast' nearly two years ago has criticized the government for being

slow to act.

Emma Whitfield's son Jack Lis is one of several children killed by the dogs.

While she has said she is relieved by the ban, she is also urging the government to tackle the source of the problem once and for all.

"Banning the dog at the moment will help... but if backyard breeders still exist, they are going to create a new breed and we could find ourselves in a few years in the same place," she said.

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