



Dangerous Dogs: How many dog lovers mauled in their own homes does it take?

By [Dr Victoria Martindale](#) The Independent

How ironic that while Britain is renowned as a nation of dog lovers, the latest figures show the number of dog bite victims is at an all time high.

While the vast majority of the country's much loved pets are doted upon and pampered, it appears many of the victims our dogs turn on are members of the loving family that actually own and care for them in the first place.

There were almost 6,500 hospital admissions in England last year for dog bites and attacks. However the figures released by the Health and Social Care Information Centre don't reveal the true extent of the grisly story with injuries treated in A&E and sent home excluded from the data.

Children under the age of ten are more likely than any other age group to suffer severe injuries from attacks and require plastic surgery.

Now I am a dog lover. I am also a dog owner and I know only too well the pleasures and rewards that come with dog ownership as well as the extent of the responsibilities. Fulfilling responsibilities may not always be easy but for the greater, safer good of children, members of the public and the dogs themselves I recognise it is time that the unabated issue of dangerous dogs is grabbed by the scruff of the neck and brought firmly under control.

"This very real menace of society that is only getting worse each year."

Yet it seems that despite bitten viciously many times we are not yet shy. But how many children mauled, police officers hospitalised and beloved pets savagely ripped to pieces does it take to address this very real menace of society that is only getting worse each year? Not forgetting the cautionary destruction of countless innocent dogs by virtue of mere appearance alone. Why, after all the talking, all the serious proposals outlined by the nation's expert dog organisations and all the consultations held does the government continue to pussyfoot around with feeble ineffectual measures that fail to protect its people and man's best friend?

Meanwhile, "good" responsible dog owners are being penalised with draconian actions imposed upon their daft labradoodles or puny chihuahuas by well intended but misguided local councils- from keeping their pooches muzzled and on leads at all times to banning them altogether from public spaces. The government's new guidelines that could see owners of dogs which attack people in public face tougher penalties is yet another ill thought out response that fails to prevent the attacks before they actually happen.

The shameful truth is that although it is commonly accepted that it is the owner who is dangerous and not the dog, according to DEFRA, a paltry 20 people are in jail for dangerous dog offences while thousands of dogs, the vast majority of them young, healthy and good tempered, are destroyed every year. While the underlying problems of lack of responsible ownership, liability and unregulated breeding lie at the heart of the problem, they also lie at the heart of the solution. Many of the culprits are status dogs trained as fighting weapons and owned by gang members.

And I support compulsory microchipping of all dogs too. Responsibility for the dog remains with the registered owner, identified by their National Insurance number, until they inform the microchip service of the new ownership details. Police, dog wardens, RSPCA inspectors and benefit officers are all authorised to carry out spot scans. The owner of any dog scanned without a chip is issued a fine on the spot and given a weeks grace to get it done. Should the dog owner be unable to provide proof of their identity and address the dog should be confiscated. Costs would be recuperated by the savings to the NHS, council

seizure, police custody and kenneling costs.

Of course, no system is perfect and tough measures will undoubtedly be received with resentment widely among dog owners, myself included. But it is necessary if we are to stand up for all the victims and save lives.

Thousands of affectionate dogs are obedient and docile enough to be looked upon and treated as part of the family, yet the reputation and trust of all of them is tarnished by society's fear of a handful that are genuinely out of control and pose a real danger. It is not fair to go on ignoring the problems of man's best friend, just as it is unacceptable to leave our children exposed to the risks they pose. This cannot continue. The dangerous dogs issue must be tamed. The time for the government to get its teeth into this matter is long overdue.