

## **Avoid hot dogs: New legal analysis highlights owners' duty to protect dogs from over-heating**

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The Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs ([LAGECDogs](#)) has released a new analysis highlighting the legal responsibilities of dog owners and carers under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in England and Wales (and devolved equivalents for Scotland and Northern Ireland) to take all reasonable steps to prevent heat-related illnesses (HRI) in their dogs. The analysis also highlights the extra requirements placed on those who are responsible for dogs with extreme conformations (body/face shape). This analysis will support dog owners and carers, as well as the general public, to protect canine welfare during hot weather.

The risk of heat-related illnesses in dogs in the UK is rising, partially due to climate change and also because of the ongoing high demand to own flat-faced (e.g. English Bulldog, Pug, French Bulldog) and thick-coated (e.g. Chow Chow, Newfoundland) dog breeds. Developed by LAGECDogs, part of the UK Centre for Animal Law UK, this new analysis is the first of its kind to outline the legal responsibilities of owners and temporary carers, such as walkers, sitters and groomers, to protect their dogs from heat-related illness. It also draws on the large body of veterinary research on heat-related illness published from the VetCompass Programme at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC).

This includes that:

- Up to 70% of heat-related illness cases in dogs are caused by exercising the dog in warm weather, whilst the remaining 30% result from confining a dog to a warm environment. This evidence demonstrates the vital role owners can play in preventing heat-related illness in dogs by avoiding these risky actions.
- Dogs with extreme physical characteristics, including flat faces (brachycephalic breeds) and thick coats, face a significantly higher risk of heat-related illness. For example, Chow Chows are 16.6 times more likely to suffer from heat-related illness than Labradors, with English Bulldogs 14 times more likely and French Bulldogs 6.5 times more likely.
- There is an increased risk for older, overweight dogs, and dogs with respiratory impairment.

The LAGECDogs legal analysis assists owners by outlining the reasonable steps which all dog owners and carers should take in warm weather to protect their dogs against heat-related illness, including:

- Limiting exercise to the cooler parts of the day
- Reducing the duration and intensity of exercise
- Offering your dog frequent access to shade and avoiding walking on tarmac or hot pavements
- Ensuring constant access to drinking water in the home and outside
- Wetting the dog, where appropriate
- Keeping cool any vehicle in which the dog is travelling
- Recognising signs of heat-related illness, such as panting, drooling, vomiting, and lethargy, and taking immediate action, including seeking veterinary advice.

As there is a heightened risk of heat-related illness in flat-faced dogs and dogs with thick coats, owners and carers of these breeds are legally required to take extra steps to protect their dog in warm weather, according to the analysis. These include:

- More careful limits on exercise in warm weather
- More frequent cooling/wetting of the dog

- More frequent observation of the dog for signs of heat-related illness
- Monitoring weather forecasts so that adaptations can be made to the dog's environment or exercise plans in advance.

While owners with concerns about a dog suspected of having heat-related illness are always encouraged to seek veterinary advice, LAGECDogs urges anyone responsible for a dog to familiarise themselves with public education campaigns such as “[Dogs Die on Hot Walks](#)”, which reflects new RVC VetCompass evidence that walking dogs in hot weather is a greater risk than confinement alone.

LAGECDogs' legal analysis alerts owners that failing to take reasonable steps to protect dogs in hot weather could breach Sections 4 and 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, potentially leading to prosecution, fines or imprisonment.

**Dr Dan O'Neill, Associate Professor of Companion Animal Epidemiology at the RVC, and part of LAGECDogs, said:**

*“Owning a dog brings great joy but also holds a responsibility to protect that dog from unnecessary harm or suffering, and the RVC continues to support strengthening public and professional awareness of the steps that should be taken during warm conditions.”*

*“This new legal analysis from LAGECDogs is a critical tool that links legal and scientific evidence to explain to the UK general public about their legally binding responsibility to take all reasonable steps to prevent heat-related illness in dogs. As climate change progresses, it may become a legally reasonable step in the future to avoid acquiring a dog with an extreme conformation that predisposes the animal to heat-related illness.”*

**Dr. Helena Howe, Associate Professor in Law at the University of Sussex and Chair of LAGECDogs, said:**

*“Warm weather poses a serious risk to dogs, especially those with extreme conformations. As a nation of dog-lovers we want our dogs to be safe and comfortable during the summer but not everyone is aware of their legal duties to protect dogs from heat-related suffering. This analysis explains that anyone responsible for a dog is legally required to take reasonable steps to prevent them from developing a heat-related illness. Notably, extra steps are legally required to meet the additional needs of dogs whose extreme conformations have been shown to make them particularly vulnerable to heat.”*

**ENDS**

## **Notes to Editors**

For more information about heatstroke in dogs and cats and how to prevent it, please visit:

- <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/small-animal-vet/teaching-and-research/fact-files/heatstroke-in-dogs-and-cats>
- [https://www.rvc.ac.uk/Media/Default/VetCompass/HOW%20TO%20COOL%20HOT%20DOG%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.rvc.ac.uk/Media/Default/VetCompass/HOW%20TO%20COOL%20HOT%20DOG%20(1).pdf)

The full analysis is available here: <https://www.alaw.org.uk/companion-animals/extreme-dog-conformation/>

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### About the Royal Veterinary College

- The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) is the UK's largest and longest established independent veterinary school and is a Member Institution of the University of London.
- It is one of the few veterinary schools in the world that hold accreditations from the RCVS in the UK (with associated recognition from the AVBC for Australasia, the VCI for Ireland and the SAVC for South Africa), the EAEVE in the EU, and AVMA (probationary) in the USA and Canada.
- The RVC is ranked as the top veterinary school in the world in the QS World University Rankings by subject, 2025.
- The RVC offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in veterinary medicine, veterinary nursing and biological sciences.
- The RVC is a research-led institution, with 88% of its research rated as internationally excellent or world class in the Research Excellence Framework 2021.
- The RVC provides animal owners and the veterinary profession with access to expert veterinary care and advice through its teaching hospitals and first opinion practices in London and Hertfordshire.
- <http://www.rvc.ac.uk>

### About the LAGECDogs

The **Legal Advisory Group on Extreme Conformation in Dogs (LAGECDogs)** are a multi-disciplinary sub-group with legal, scientific and welfare expertise within the UK Centre for Animal Law ([A-LAW](#)) dedicated to the creation of a more effective legal and policy regime in the UK to protect domesticated dogs from conformation-related suffering. Our research and analysis address the capacity of the current legal framework to protect dogs from the harms resulting from selective breeding for conformational extremes, with much of our early work focused on the legal and welfare issues around brachycephaly (short muzzle).

### LAGECDogs Members

- [Vanessa Barnes](#), Solicitor (non-practising) and Legal Advisor at APGAW (All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare)
- [Fiona Cooke](#) Head of Specialist Services at Woodgreen Pets Charity
- [Natalie Harney](#), Campaign Manager (Companion Animals) at Naturewatch Foundation, and A-LAW Trustee
- [Helena Howe](#) (*chair*), Senior Lecturer in Law, University of Sussex
- [Tamara Katamine](#), Doctoral Candidate in Law at Queen Mary, University of London
- [Hannah Molloy](#) Animal Behaviourist at Amplified Behaviour
- [Dan O'Neill](#), Associate Professor in Companion Animal Epidemiology at RVC and Chair of the UK Brachycephalic Working Group
- [Rowena Packer](#), Senior Lecturer in Companion Animal Behaviour and Welfare Science, RVC

- [Mike Radford OBE](#), Reader at the University of Aberdeen with significant expertise in Animal Law and A-LAW Trustee.