

UK Brachycephalic Working Group consensus on advice for anyone thinking of purchasing a brachycephalic dog:
“Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog”

UK Brachycephalic Working Group
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Summary

- Rising demand for certain flat-faced (brachycephalic) dog breeds is leading to serious welfare issues for huge numbers of dogs that adds to the intrinsic issues associated with their exaggerated physical conformations.
- Everyone involved with dogs should work together to discourage further ownership of flat-faced dogs.
- The UK Brachycephalic Working Group calls upon every individual person and organisation associated with dogs to share widely our core welfare-based message: **‘Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog’**. This message aims to discourage new ownership of brachycephalic dogs and therefore to improve the welfare of dogs overall.

Background

The UK Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) includes leading UK dog welfare organisations, veterinary organisations, the Kennel Club and breed clubs, academia and government. Recent rapid rises in popularity of certain brachycephalic breeds is leading to a population-based increase of ill health and compromised welfare from these breed types. BWG’s ambition is to minimise the negative impacts that brachycephalism (flat-faced conformation) has on the welfare of dogs in the UK. It aims to achieve this by collaborative activities that lead to healthier conformations in these dogs as well as reduced overall ownership.

BWG accepts that the welfare issues surrounding the brachycephalic crisis in dogs are complex and therefore mitigation will require collaborative actions from many stakeholders, which address both the supply of, and demand for, brachycephalic dogs. Reducing and eliminating the welfare impacts from brachycephalism in dogs is a shared goal of everyone who cares about dogs and their health and welfare, including owners, dog breeders, dog registering bodies (such as the UK Kennel Club), dog breed clubs, veterinary professionals, academics, government and animal charities. The general public is a key stakeholder in dog welfare. BWG asks every organisation and individual with an interest in the welfare of dogs to widely share and explain our ‘call to action’ to the general public: “Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog”.

Brachycephaly (being flat-faced) is a conformation in dogs that is associated with several health problems that occur in substantial proportions of the brachycephalic dog population (1, 2). These problems include: breathing difficulties (3-5), recurring skin fold infections (6),

eye ulcers (7, 8), problems giving birth naturally (9, 10), spinal problems (11) and heat-related illness (12, 13).

Sudden popularity of certain breeds such as French Bulldogs, Pugs and [English] Bulldogs has led to a health and welfare crisis for these breeds, related to their breeding, sourcing and intrinsic health problems. To produce the high volumes of puppies needed to meet rising demand, in some cases, breeding decisions are taken with little regard for the future health and welfare of the puppies being produced. Breeding bitches may be kept in poor environments, with many puppies being poorly socialised and therefore prone to behavioural problems later in life. Online sales of puppies in the UK enables unscrupulous puppy dealers to profit from large volumes of sales with little or no aftercare and the loss of the supportive relationships that often develop between the original breeder and the new owner. High public demand for puppies of these flat-faced breeds means that large numbers of puppies and even pregnant bitches are now also being imported legally or illegally into the UK from countries with lower health and welfare standards for dogs than in the UK (14).

Call to Action

1. **To the general public.** The core message from BWG is to urge you to “Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog”. BWG appeals to anyone thinking about purchasing a brachycephalic dog to play their part in reducing the current brachycephalic crisis by reflecting deeply on their choice of dog breed, in particular the health issues associated with the breed and potential veterinary and insurance costs. Think about whether a brachycephalic breed is the right choice for you and your lifestyle. Arrange a pre-purchase consultation with your local vet to discuss the evidence on the health issues that are common in these breeds. Review the evidence on the health issues that are common in these breeds. Whichever breed you choose, ensure you purchase from a [responsible breeder](#) and use the [Puppy Contract](#) and Puppy Information Pack to avoid supporting those sectors of the breeding industry that cause misery to so many dogs.
2. **To veterinary professionals** - Offer pre-purchase consultations, such as the [PDSA “Which pet?” consultation framework](#), with prospective dog owners. The potential health and welfare problems associated with brachycephalic breeds can be clearly outlined in these consultations to support your messaging to prospective owners to ‘**Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog**’.
3. **To all welfare-minded organisations:** BWG invites all organisations with an interest in the welfare of dogs to support the aims of BWG by adopting and widely sharing the BWG strapline of “**Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog**”. Use this core ‘call to action’ to strengthen your own messaging on brachycephalic issues in dogs and to encourage improved decision-making from would-be owners.

The BWG welcomes and encourages the widespread use of the strapline “**Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog**” to support positive messaging that aims to improve the welfare of brachycephalic dogs.

However, the BWG accepts no responsibility for, and does not necessarily support, every opinion that may accompany the usage of this strapline.

Further resources

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13. Hall EJ, Carter AJ, O'Neill DG. Dogs Don't Die Just in Hot Cars—Exertional Heat-Related Illness (Heatstroke) Is a Greater Threat to UK Dogs. Animals. 2020;10(8):1324.
14. Dogs Trust. Puppy Smuggling - When will this cruel trade end? : Dogs Trust,; 2019 [Available from: https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/puppy-smuggling/111018_puppy%20smuggling%202018_final.pdf].