

PANDEMIC PUPPY BOOM WORSENING 'FLAT-FACED' DOG HEALTH CRISIS, EXPERTS WARN

New figures indicate record-high lockdown trends for some flat-faced breeds, exacerbating already serious dog welfare concerns

A collaboration of dog health and welfare experts including vets, rescue organisations, scientists and breeders are urging would-be owners to 'stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog', as new data reveals that in 2020 – the year of the Pandemic Puppy – the popularity of some of these breeds increased to new record-highs.

Experts believe that many new owners of in-demand brachycephalic breeds like French Bulldogs, Pugs and English Bulldogs, which are often referred to as 'flat-faced' due to their short, compressed heads, may have little understanding of some of the health problems these dogs can face, or of the welfare implications for man's best friend if their puppy was bred indiscriminately to meet the huge pandemic puppy demand.

Figures from The Kennel Club, released today (11th May 2021) by the Brachycephalic Working Group*, show that during 2020 the French Bulldog, owned by many high-profile celebrities including Lady GaGa and the Beckhams, and English Bulldogs, popularised by brands and influencers alike, recorded their highest puppy registration figures since records began. Both French Bulldogs and Bulldogs increased in popularity by 17 per cent compared to 2019, with 39,266 French Bulldog puppies registered in 2020 and 11,594 Bulldog puppies respectively.

The French Bulldog was also one of the most searched-for breeds via The Kennel Club's 'Find a Puppy' tool during the pandemic puppy boom, alongside long-time favourites like the Labrador Retriever and Cocker Spaniel. Searches for French Bulldog puppies more than doubled – increasing by +112 per cent from March to December while the UK faced various Covid-19 restrictions – compared to the same period in 2019.

Whilst this sky-high popularity must be considered against the backdrop of significant increases in puppy ownership generally during the pandemic, experts are particularly concerned that the huge demand for these dogs will exacerbate the already existing health and welfare crisis they're facing, and encourage more rogue breeders to cash in.

Brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds can suffer from a number of health problems such as breathing, eye and skin-fold issues. These health concerns, coupled with further welfare issues caused through irresponsible high-volume breeding and importing from abroad in

order to fulfil high demand have created one of the most pressing welfare issues for dogs in the UK.

In the last decade, the three most popular brachycephalic breeds have all seen increases in popularity; French Bulldogs by an astronomical 1,682 per cent, Bulldogs by 144 per cent and Pugs - which underwent a more than six-fold boom in numbers between 2000 and 2010 - increasing by a further 5 per cent.

In response, the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG), made up of major stakeholders in dog welfare in the UK including The Kennel Club, PDSA, Dogs Trust, RSPCA, the Royal Veterinary College, the University of Cambridge, the British Veterinary Association, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association, breed clubs, and DEFRA is warning that this sky-high demand for flat-faced puppies could worsen the already serious health and welfare crisis faced by these breeds, and is asking the public to 'Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog'.

"Ownership of some of these flat-faced breeds continues to rise to alarming levels, but as a dog-loving nation, we urgently need this bubble to burst." commented Dr Dan O'Neill, Chairman of the Brachycephalic Working Group. "The UK public have been sold a fantasy that 'flat-faced' breeds are cute, but the suffering endured by many of these dogs has been ignored. As well as health issues such as struggling to breathe, many puppies sold in the UK are bred indiscriminately and many are farmed in appalling conditions, often outside the UK. With this in mind, we ask the UK public to 'Stop and think before buying a flat-faced dog.'

"As a caring society, we must take action now to put the needs of these dogs above our human desires to own dogs just because of how they look."

Dr O'Neill added: "Please do your research and consider the lifetime of problems that these dogs can face. Don't buy a flat-faced breed on an impulse or just because they 'look cute'. Think about their potential health issues, or that they may have been bred indiscriminately to meet demand. There are over 200 breeds of dogs as well as lots of crossbreeds: consider a non-flat-faced type of dog instead for you and your family."

Bill Lambert, Head of Health and Welfare at The Kennel Club and member of the BWG added: "If you have done extensive research on all the dogs and breeds out there, understand any health concerns, have thought carefully about these and still think a brachycephalic breed is right for you, it's absolutely crucial to find a reputable breeder who puts health first.

“A good breeder will health test the parents before they are bred from and will always introduce potential new puppy owners to the mum, and ideally the dad, so that they can see if they have any exaggerated features such as overly short muzzles, partially closed nostrils or excessive skin folds, which are likely to be passed onto the pup and may contribute to health issues.”

Regardless of which type of dog you decide to bring into your family, the Brachycephalic Working Group advises using The Puppy Contract (thepuppycontract.co.uk), finding an experienced and responsible breeder, such as a Kennel Club Assured Breeder, and being prepared to wait for the right dog to become available. More information about flat-faced breeds specifically, and the issues they can face, is available at: thekennelclub.org.uk/flat-faced-dogs

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Kennel Club breed registration figures and percentage increases for the three most popular brachycephalic breeds, broken down by recent decades, and from 2019 to 2020:

	2000 annual puppy registratio ns	2010 annual puppy registratio ns	2019 annual puppy registratio ns	2020 annual puppy registratio ns	20 year % change: 2020 vs 2000 counts	10 year % change: 2020 vs 2010 counts	One % change: 2020 vs 2019 counts
French Bulldog	227	2,204	33,661	39,266	17,198	1,682	17
Bulldog	1,973	4,746	9,922	11,594	488	144	17
Pug	861	5,726	6,751	6,033	601	5	-11

- Searches for French Bulldog puppies via the Kennel Club’s ‘Find a Puppy’ tool increased by 112 per cent during March and December 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. For actual figures please email press.office@thekennelclub.org.uk

***About the Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) www.ukbwg.org.uk**

The BWG comprises leading UK dog welfare bodies, veterinary organisations, scientific & social researchers and breed clubs. The group aims to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic (flat faced) dogs by working together to improve the conformation-related

health of individual dogs as well as reducing the current trend towards rising demand for these dogs. These aims are being approached by a series of actions that target the brachycephalic welfare issue at several points.

The BWG includes representatives of all major stakeholders in dog welfare in the UK. These include:

- Academia – Royal Veterinary College, University of Cambridge
- Breed clubs – Bulldog, French Bulldog, Pug
- Veterinary profession – British Veterinary Association (BVA), British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
- The Kennel Club
- DEFRA
- Animal charities – Dogs Trust, PDSA, RSPCA
- Owners, breeders, Veterinary surgeons