

# American Humane Association™

The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals™

## U.S. Pet (Dog and Cat) Population Fact Sheet

### PET DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

U.S. households that own a pet (bird, cat, dog, horse, fish, reptile, small animal) – 62% (72.9 million households)

#### Dogs

U.S. households that own a dog – 37 to 46% (43.5 to 54.1 million households)

Estimated U.S. dog population – 70 to 78 million

Average number of dogs per household (of those owning a dog) – 1.6 to 1.7

Most popular purebred American Kennel Club (AKC) breeds - 2011

1. Labrador retriever
2. German shepherd dog
3. Beagle
4. Golden retriever
5. Yorkshire terrier

Number of AKC recognized breeds in 2012: 175

Number of United Kennel Club (UKC) recognized breeds in 2012: over 300

**Breed trends** – The Labrador retriever has topped the AKC list for dog registration statistics for the past decade. Breeds that have grown in popularity from 2001 to 2011 include some of the smaller breeds (e.g., Beagle, Yorkshire terrier, French bulldog, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel). Purebred dog registration has declined in the past decade with “designer dogs” becoming more popular (e.g., Cocker Pug, Labradoodle, Cockapoo, etc.). Pitbull-type dogs have also increased in popularity over the past decade. Genetic test kits are now available to determine the breed makeup of a dog.

**Most popular type of dog** – Mixed breed dog (53 percent of all U.S. dogs)

**Source of pet dogs** – Family/friends (38%), Shelter/Rescue Organization (22%), Breeder (16%) – American Humane Association survey (2012)

**Other types of dogs**

**Military Working Dogs (MWD)** – Internet sources report that there are on average about 3,000 MWD on active duty MWD in all branches of





the military. About 300 to 350 MWDs retire each year. The Department of Defense, however, does not release the exact number of dogs for national security reasons, thus numbers are estimates.

**Service Dogs** – There are approximately 20,000 service dogs in the U.S., which includes 10,000 guide dogs

- *A service animal is any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks that benefit an individual with a disability*
- *Americans with Disabilities Act 1990, Title III 2010 Revised Regulations-36.104, allows service animals public access*
- *There is a provision for miniature horses who meet certain requirements to be allowed*
- *The ADA protects the rights of people with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals. Service animals may be identified as “assistance animal/dog,” “support animal/dog,” or “helper dog”*

#### **Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) Dogs**

Therapy dogs and their handlers are trained to provide specific human populations with comfort, distraction and motivation in order to improve the client’s health and well-being. These dogs are the personal pets of the handlers and accompany their handlers to the sites they visit, such as hospitals, schools, and nursing homes. Animals must meet specific criteria for health, grooming and behavior. While managed by their handlers, their work during AAT is not handler-focused and instead provides benefits to others.

#### **Search and Rescue, Drug Enforcement Agency dogs, and others**

There are many dogs working each day on our behalf. Some dogs detect explosives at airports, some are trained to detect cancer, and some search for lost children. American Humane Association holds an annual Hero Dog event celebrating these amazing heroes.

#### **Pet Health – Morbidity and Mortality Trends**

**Obesity** – Obesity is considered an “epidemic” for dogs, cats and people. 56% of dogs, 54% of cats, and 69% of humans (adults over the age years of 20 years) in U.S. were considered overweight or obese in 2011.

**Diabetes** – Diabetes is reported to be increasing in both dogs (up 32%) and cats (up 16%) since 2006 [Banfield hospital data – 800 hospitals]

**Common health problems seen in dogs at veterinary clinics** – dental disease, ear infections, allergies, skins infections/growths, vomiting/diarrhea, arthritis, bladder infections, bruises/contusions, hypothyroidism. Some pet insurance companies also provide data on health issues most likely to affect a specific breed

**Regional diseases** – Some diseases are more common in certain geographic locations; examples:

- Southern states* – Heartworm disease, flea and tick infestation
- Southwest* – Valley Fever

**Cancer** – Cancer is the #1 cause of death in dogs over the age of two years

- One in two dogs will acquire cancer; one in four will die from cancer

- Golden retrievers – 60% will die from cancer
- Certain breeds of dogs are at-risk for certain type of cancer; examples:

*Greyhounds – Bone cancer*  
*Scottish terriers – Bladder cancer*  
*Pugs – Mast cell cancer*  
*Bernese Mountain Dog – Histiocytic sarcoma*  
*Boxer – Brain cancer*  
*Collie – Nasal cancer*  
*Chow Chow – Stomach cancer*  
*Golden retrievers – Hemangiosarcoma and Lymphoma*  
*Labrador retrievers – Hemangiosarcoma and Lymphoma*  
*Poodles – Mammary tumors (incidence greatly reduced in dogs neutered prior to puberty)*

**Euthanasia of Dogs** – Euthanasia, often of healthy unwanted dogs, is the #1 cause of death in dogs under the age of two years



## Cats

**U.S. households that own a cat** – 30 to 39% (35.3 to 45.9 million households)

**Estimated U.S. cat population** – 74 to 86 million (household pets)  
 Estimate - Another 50 million cats are feral or community cats

**Average number of cats per household (of those owning a cat)** – 2.1 to 2.2

**Most popular purebred breeds (2011)**

1. Persian
2. Maine Coon
3. Exotic
4. Ragdoll
5. Sphynx

**Most popular type of cat** – Domestic shorthair (95% of all U.S. cats)

**Source of cats** – Family/friends (41%), Stray (22%), Shelter/Rescue Organization (18%) – American Humane Association survey (2012)

**Pet Health – Morbidity and Mortality Trends**

**Obesity** – Obesity is considered an “epidemic” for dogs, cats and people. 56% of dogs, 54% of cats, and 69% of humans (adults over the age years of 20 years) in U.S. were considered overweight or obese in 2011

**Diabetes** – Diabetes is reported to be increasing in both dogs (up 32%) and cats (up 16%) since 2006 [Banfield hospital data – 800 hospitals]

**Common health problems seen in cats at veterinary clinics** – bladder infections, chronic kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, upset stomach, periodontal/dental disease, diabetes, intestinal upset/diarrhea, ear infections, allergies, lymphoma





**Regional/Seasonal Diseases** – Some diseases are more prevalent in certain environments, regions, and/or seasons. Examples:

*Plague* – Caused by *Yersinia pestis* is primarily found in SW between the months of May and October

*Heartworm disease* – Cats allowed access to outdoors are more likely to acquire heartworm disease

**Most common cause of death in older cats** – Renal (kidney) disease, cancer and infectious disease. One in 12 older cats has chronic kidney disease [Banfield Hospital Data – 800 hospitals]

**Cancer** – Injection-site sarcoma, oral cancers, lymphoma, feline leukemia, mammary tumors (incidence of mammary tumors greatly reduced in cats neutered prior to puberty)

**Euthanasia of Cats** – Euthanasia, often of healthy unwanted cats, is the #1 cause of death. Recent regional and national trends suggest that the intake and euthanasia numbers are increasing in U.S. shelters, unlike dogs where intake and euthanasia numbers are decreasing and trends are more positive

**General Information Regarding Cats** – Cats receive less veterinary care and less research on their diseases than do dogs. The amount of money spent on veterinary care for cats is also less than for dogs. In a study conducted by the American Humane Association, 35 percent of U.S. individuals, who had never owned a pet as an adult, indicated that they did not like cats (versus 12 percent indicating that they did not like dogs). Dogs are more likely to be considered as future pets than cats. The demographic for a future cat owner is a single, younger individual. In one survey, young male Hispanics were more likely to consider a cat as a future pet [Morris Animal Foundation]

## Unwanted Pets

**Number of dogs and cats entering U.S. animal care and control facilities each year:** A wide range is given by national organizations on the number of dogs and cats entering shelters – 5 to 8 million. This is one reason that a National Database Project launched in 2012.

**Number of dogs and cats euthanized at U.S. animal care and control facilities each year:** 3 to 4 million

### Regional differences

New Hampshire (lowest in the U.S.) – 2.2 euthanasias/1,000 people  
Southern states – some of the highest euthanasia rates/1,000 people

### Number of shelters/rescue agencies in U.S.

- 13,688 shelters/rescue groups are members of petfinder.com – 2012 data
- Estimated number of shelters: 5,000 to 6,000 in U.S. (these have physical facilities)
- Estimated number of rescue groups: 8,000 (generally do not have physical facilities)



## Top Reported Causes for Pet Relinquishment (National Council on Pet Population and Study Data)

### Dogs

1. Moving
2. Landlord issues
3. Cost of pet maintenance
4. No time for pet
5. Inadequate facilities
6. Too many pets in home
7. Pet illness(es)
8. Personal problems
9. Biting
10. No homes for littermates

### Cats

1. Too many in house
2. Allergies
3. Moving
4. Cost of pet maintenance
5. Landlord issues
6. No homes for littermates
7. House soiling
8. Personal problems
9. Inadequate facilities
10. Doesn't get along with other pets

### Progress Made

In 1986, it was estimated that 17.6 to 29.2 million dogs and cats were euthanized in shelters each year [American Humane Association Shelter Reporting Study]. These numbers were estimates, and if accurate would have accounted for nearly one-fifth to one-fourth of the entire U.S. pet population. Because of these dire statistics, the American Humane Association and nine other national groups convened to establish the National Council on Pet Population and Study. This Council conducted valuable research to identify risk factors for pet relinquishment and has been partly credited with the decreased euthanasia of healthy pets in our nation. The Society of Animal Welfare Administrators now oversees the Council.



### Ongoing Challenges

**Recession:** The American Veterinary Medical Association reported (August 2012) that household pet ownership has declined from 2006 to 2011. Households owning dogs were down 1.9 percent and households owning cats were down 6.2 percent. Although pets had declined in U.S. households, the amount of money dog and cat owners spent on veterinary care during the same time period increased 18.6 and 4.2 percent, respectfully. Veterinary visits increased for dogs from 2006 to 2011 and decreased for cats. This data suggest that veterinary costs are increasing, with many pet owners unable to afford the cost of medical care for their animals.



In a study conducted by the American Humane Association (2012), the #1 reason for giving up a pet (21 percent for cats; 29 percent for dogs) was that a landlord or place of residence would not allow dogs or cats. While there is few data on the effect of recession on pet ownership, one cannot help but conclude that home foreclosures affected the ability of many owners to keep their animal family members as they were forced into rental, or other, housing situations.

In the same American Humane Association survey, a top reason for not acquiring another dog/cat was "veterinary expenses" (30% for previous dog owners; 25% for previous cat owners).

**Lack of Information:** Regional and national data suggest that intake and euthanasia rates in U.S. shelters for cats is increasing. Unfortunately, there are few studies to suggest reasons for this troubling trend. Thus, intervention strategies are difficult to implement.



**Humane Euthanasia in Shelters:** Nineteen states have banned the use of gas chambers in the U.S. (carbon monoxide), considering this form of euthanasia to be inhumane and potentially dangerous to personnel.

**Federal Legislation Proposed** – Congressman Jim Moran, Northern Virginia Democrat and co-chair of the Congressional Animal Protection Caucus, introduced a resolution, H. Res. 736, opposing the use of gas chambers to euthanize shelter animals. The resolution calls for states to alternatively use established injectable euthanasia drugs and ensure that appropriate training and certification in these methods is widely available [July 20, 2012]

American Humane Association, Association of Shelter Veterinarians and the American Veterinary Medical Association all recommend euthanasia-by-injection (EBI), which is safer for personnel and more humane for animals being euthanized. American Humane Association provides training courses for EBI.

**Regional Challenges:** Oklahoma state law prohibits counties with populations less than 200,000 from issuing animal control ordinances, which also excludes the operation of an animal shelter. Thus, animals in several counties are left to fend for themselves, are shot or are killed by other means. The Kirkpatrick Foundation (Oklahoma City) has initiated a collaborative program whereby they hope to advance animal welfare throughout Oklahoma.

**Public Opinion:** The public is demanding that pet overpopulation is addressed through collaborative efforts between the veterinary profession, animal welfare groups, non-profit agencies, governmental agencies and the pet industry. In a survey conducted by IPSOS Marketing for Petsmart Charities (2009), owners ranked their familiarity with social issues:

#### **Dog Owners**

1. Overpopulation of dogs and cats
2. Global warming
3. Teenage pregnancy
4. Homelessness in the U.S.
5. World poverty

#### **Cat Owners**

1. Overpopulation of dogs and cats
2. Global warming
3. Teenage pregnancy
4. World poverty
5. Homelessness in the U.S.

## **The Benefits/Risks of Pets for Child Wellness and Well-being**

### **Benefits**

Research over the past 10 years has found that having dogs or cats in the home during infancy may lower a child's risk to certain illnesses, including reduced risk to allergies linked to asthma

Children having dogs at home were shown to be healthier (i.e., had fewer respiratory tract symptoms or infections, fewer ear infections, required fewer antibiotics) than children with no dogs. The weekly amount of contact

and the yearly amount of contact with dogs and cats were associated with decreased respiratory infectious disease morbidity



Children who grow up with pets demonstrate more empathy, are more popular with classmates, and are more involved in activities such as sports, hobbies, clubs or chores

Animals can provide comfort to children who are ill, act as a source of unconditional acceptance and social support, and provide support when family dynamics are changing (e.g., divorce)

[Note: American Humane Association is conducting a major research study at children's hospitals throughout the U.S. to assess the potential benefit of AAT dogs for children receiving therapy for cancer]



### Risks

The Centers for Disease Control report that 4.5 million people are bitten by dogs every year. Of these, 800,000 seek medical attention and half are children between the ages of 5 and 9. Approximately 16 of these attacks are fatal each year. Some insurance companies consider dog breeds in a household when considering whether or not to provide home owners insurance.

A dog from any breed can bite a child. Thus, it becomes important to properly introduce a child to dog and teach children how to avoid being bitten. American Humane Association has a pamphlet available to new parents, *Pet Meets Baby*.



By compiling U.S. and Canadian press accounts between 1982 and 2011, *Animal People*, listed the following breeds and associated outcomes for dog bites:

The combination of pit bulls, Rottweilers, their close mixes and wolf hybrids:

- 77% of attacks that induce bodily harm
- 73% of attacks to children
- 81% of attack to adults
- 68% of attacks that result in fatalities
- 76% that result in maiming

Forbes (2012) reported on a list of eleven breeds that were riskier for home owners and renters, and may be associated with higher home owner's insurance costs. In some cases, insurance companies will not insure when certain breeds are part of the family (especially true for the first four breeds on the list):



1. Pit Bulls & Staffordshire Terriers
2. Doberman Pinschers
3. Rottweilers
4. German Shepherds
5. Chows
6. Great Danes
7. Presa Canarios
8. Akitas
9. Alaskan Malamutes
10. Siberian Huskies
11. Wolf-hybrids

## References for Fact Sheet



# American Humane Association™

The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals™

[www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org)

APPA National Pet Owners Survey, 2011-2012

AVMA Press Release (Sneak preview of AVMA Pet Demographic Sourcebook), August 2012

American Kennel Club 2011 Dog Registration Statistics

American Kennel Club 2012, breeds - <http://www.akc.org/breeds/>

Wisdom Panel Canine Genetic Analysis – Mars Veterinary

Pet Obesity Prevention accessed on 9/11/2012 at

<http://www.petobesityprevention.com/pet-obesity-fact-risks/>

CDC website, 9/11/2011 at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/overwt.htm>

Banfield Pet Hospital State of Pet Health 2011 Report

Pet insurance data from Veterinary Pet Insurance Company (VPI) 9/11/2012 at

<http://www.press.petinsurances.com/pressroom/346.aspx>

Pet insurance information from Trupanion Pet Insurance, 10/22/2012

<http://breedguide.trupanion.com/pet-health-problems>

Nation's first ever mutt census – April 5, 2011, Mars Veterinary

Can Fancier's Association, Inc. – Breed popularity data, 2011

Humane Society of the United States; [http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral\\_cats/](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/)

Morris K, Wolf JL, Geis DL. Trends in intake and outcome data for animal shelters in Colorado, 2000 to 2006, JAVMA 238:329-336, 2011

Keeping Pets (Dogs and Cats) in Homes: A Three-Phase Retention Study, American Humane Association, 2012

ASPCA - <http://www.asPCA.org/about-us/faq/pet-statistics.aspx>, 10/22/2012

Morris Animal Foundation, research funding levels for companion animals, 2004-2010

Morris Animal Foundation, Cat Perception Survey, 2009

Petfinder.com, 10/22/2012, <http://www.petfinder.com/shelters.html>, 10/22/2012

United Kennel Club; <http://www.ukcdogs.com/Web.nsf/WebPages/Library/BreedStandards>

Nasser, R., Fluke, J. American Humane Animal Shelter Reporting Study: 1986

Winn Foundation; [http://www.winnfelinehealth.org/pages/geriatric\\_cats\\_alice\\_wolf\\_web.pdf](http://www.winnfelinehealth.org/pages/geriatric_cats_alice_wolf_web.pdf)

National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy -

<http://www.petpopulation.org/topten.html>

<http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/lawmaking/animal-gas-chambers-draw-fire.html>

<http://moran.house.gov/press-release/moran-introduces-resolution-opposing-euthanasia-animal-shelters>

Community as Shelters: Examining America's Pet Overpopulation Crisis, Controversy and Solutions, Tracy Coppola, JD, American Humane Association, 2012

Guide Dogs for the Blind, Inc. <http://www.guidedogs.com>

<http://disability.mo.gov/pdf/ServiceAnimalsAllowed.pdf>

Pet Partners (formerly the Delta Society) - <https://www.deltasociety.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=368>

Ownby DR, Wray BB. Does exposure to cats or dogs in early life alter a child's risk of atopic dermatitis? J Pediatr, February 158(2): 184-186, 2011

<http://www.dogsbite.org/dog-bite-statistics.php>

CDC Dog Bite Fact Sheet. 9/13/2012.

<http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/dog-bites/dogbite-factsheet.html>

Bergroth E, Remes S, Pekkanen J, et al., Respiratory track illnesses during the first year of life: Effect of Dog and Cat Contacts. Pediatrics 130(2): 211-220, 2012

Melson, G.F., Pet ownership and attachment in young children: Relations to behavior problems and social competence. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Delta Society, Houston, TX, 1990.

Examining the effects of therapy dogs with childhood cancer patients and their families, Literature review, Pfizer Animal Health – American Humane Association, 2011

<http://spousebuzz.com/blog/2012/07/mil-working-dogs-should-get-benefits-too.html>

<http://www.herodogawards.org/>

<http://www.americanhumane.org/interaction/programs/humane-education/pet-meets-baby.html>

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/cateyhill/2012/05/30/11-riskiest-dog-breeds-for-homeowners-and-renters/>

*Acknowledgments for contributions to the Fact Sheet Preparation: Dr. Katie Steneroden, Dr. Kevin Morris and Dr. Patricia Olson*