

EXPERTS WARN NOISY BREATHING IS SIGN OF SUFFERING IN POPULAR DOGS

- **Dog experts warn that noisy breathing in flat-faced dogs such as French Bulldogs, Pugs and Bulldogs is a sign of breathing problems.**
- **'Trendy' French Bulldogs and other flat-faced breeds are sometimes bred for fashion over health, resulting in ongoing issues**
- **Experts warn people to stop and think before buying these breeds**
- **And owners advised to keep their dogs slim and attend annual general health examinations along with breathing assessments every two years.**

An expert group is issuing a warning to owners of some of the UK's most popular dog breeds that 'noisy breathing' could be a sign of a big welfare issue.

The national group, made up of vets, animal welfare organisations, scientists, and dog breed clubs, is urging owners of flat-faced dogs, including French Bulldogs, Pugs and [English] Bulldogs to monitor their pet's breathing for signs of distress. The warning comes amid growing concerns about high levels of respiratory problems which affect flat-faced dogs' ability to breathe freely, known as Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS).

The Brachycephalic Working Group (BWG) – which was set up in 2016 to improve flat-faced dog welfare – wants owners of flat-faced dogs to become more aware of how their dog is breathing and seek veterinary advice if their dog's breathing is noisy whilst resting or lightly exercising.

The Kennel Club and University of Cambridge also offer a breathing assessment for French Bulldogs, Bulldogs and Pugs which enables vets to assess these dogs for breathing issues, detect disease and provide advice for owners. This assessment, called the Respiratory Function Grading Scheme, is available across the UK and more information can be found on The Kennel Club website: thekennelclub.org.uk/rfgs

Flat-faced dogs, also called brachycephalic breeds, can suffer from a number of health problems, including issues with their breathing. The risk of breathing problems is especially high if they have been bred unscrupulously to have extreme features, such as a flat face or narrowed nostrils, and the resulting welfare issues have increased with rising demand for these types of dogs over the past decade and a half.

Since 2009, French Bulldogs have risen in popularity by 166% and Bulldogs by 64%, according to Kennel Club puppy registration figures.

BOAS prevents affected dogs from breathing properly, as features of an extremely flat face, such as narrow nostrils, compressed nose, and elongated soft palate, can block the movement of air through their nose and throat.

A survey of UK vets by the British Veterinary Association in 2022 found that breathing issues were by far the most common health problem vets treated flat-faced dogs for in the previous year (cited by 93% of vets). However, vets estimated that only 13% of owners were aware of health testing such as the RFG scheme.

“If a dog has noisy breathing at rest or when lightly exercising – including snoring, snorting, wheezing or raspy breath – owners should know that this is not ‘normal’ or healthy,” says Dan O’Neill, Chair of the BWG. “Some owners might not recognise air hunger as a problem, but sadly it means that their dog is suffering continuously from respiratory disease, and they should speak to their vet or visit an RFG assessor.”

While official Kennel Club puppy registrations of French Bulldogs, Pugs and [English] Bulldogs have all fallen by over a third (-36%) so far in 2024, indicating that the wider public is listening to the welfare warnings about the health issues of these dogs. However, the BWG remains hugely concerned about the health and suffering for the current huge population of these dogs that still exists. RVC VetCompass data estimates that there are 503,798 French Bulldogs, 186,725 Pugs and 132,024 Bulldogs currently in the UK so the scale of the health issues here is huge.

Dan added: “While their popularity might now be in decline, we know thousands of people still own French Bulldogs, Pugs and [English] Bulldogs and we are now reaching out to these owners to advise that they monitor their pet’s breathing carefully and to speak to their vet if they have any concerns that their dog is snoring or rasping at rest or during light exercise. Owners should also be aware that breathing problems in flat-faced dogs generally worsen with age, if their dog is overweight and during hot weather.

“BOAS is sadly not curable but there are ways that owners can help to improve their pet’s quality of life. These include keeping them slim, having annual veterinary health examinations and breathing assessments, taking care during exercise and keeping them cool during warm weather.

“The key message to the public here is that noisy breathing at rest or light exercise in flat-faced dogs is never normal and these dogs are suffering. Anyone thinking about acquiring a flat-faced dog is urged to ‘stop and think first before buying’.”

More information about the Brachycephalic Working Group and its advice for current or prospective owners can be found at ukbwg.org.uk/

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Notes to editors

Information on the Brachycephalic Working Group www.ukbwg.org.uk

The BWG comprises leading UK dog welfare bodies, veterinary organisations, the Kennel Club, 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
- Animal charities – Dogs Trust, PDSA, Blue Cross
- Owners, Breeders, Veterinary surgeons