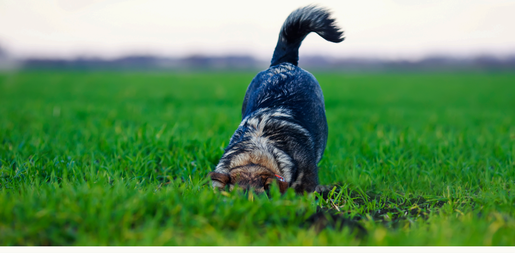
Tail injuries in dogs under primary veterinary care in the UK



A healthy, functioning tail plays an important role in a dog's life, supporting good communication, balance, and scent marking. However, tail injuries can disrupt these natural behaviours and have a significant impact on dog welfare.

This study analysed anonymised primary-care veterinary records from the VetCompass Programme to explore how often tail injuries occur in dogs in the UK, what types of dogs are at most risk, and how these injuries are typically managed in veterinary practice.

Study Population & Tail Injury Frequency

The study included a random sample of 285 tail injury cases from an overall population of 2,250,741 dogs.

Approx. 1 in 435 of all dogs in the UK present for veterinary care with a tail injury each year.

The median age of cases (4.0 yrs) was younger than the median age of controls (5.2 yrs).

Breeds Most at Risk of Tail Injury*

*compared with crossbreeds

Boxer (3.61 x the risk)

Springer Spaniel (x 2.46)

Cocker Spaniel (x 1.86)

Neutered females (x 5.65), neutered males (x 5.59) and entire males (x 2.16) had increased risk of tail injury compared with entire females.

Dogs aged ≥ 12 years had the lowest risk of tail injury (x 0.23) compared with dogs < 2 years.

The French Bulldog had reduced risk of tail injury compared with crossbreds (x 0.11)

Compared to breads that were not recognised by the Kennel Club, the KC Toy breed group had reduced risk of tail injury (x 0.46)

Other Risk Factors for Tail Injury in Dogs

Compared to breads that were not recognised by the Kennel Club, the KC Working (x 2.21) and Gundog (x 1.85) breed groups had higher risk of tail injury.

Dogs weighing 20 to < 30 kg had significantly increased risk (x 1.65) of tail injury compared with dogs < 10 kg.

Flat-faced (brachycephalic) dog breeds had reduced risk of tail injury (x 0.58) compared with mesocephalic (medium-headed and muzzled) breeds.

Tail injury management

Pain relief and antibiotics were prescribed in 45.6% and 32.6% of tail injury cases, respectively.

Surgical tail amputation was undertaken in 9.1% of cases.

Study Conclusions

Breed-related risk was a key finding, with higher risk of injury in Boxers, English Springer Spaniels, and Cocker Spaniels. French Bulldogs as a breed typically with a congenitally short tail was protected to tail injury.

Tail injury is relatively uncommon but carries serious welfare risks. Increased awareness of the high-risk groups identified in this study offers valuable insights for owners, veterinarians, breeders, and policymakers.

CLICK HERE TO READ THE FULL STUDY

RVC VetCompass https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass carries out welfare research based on anonymised clinical information shared from over 30% of UK veterinary practices. We are very grateful to the owners and veterinary professionals who contribute to VetCompass research.