

Risk Factors & Prevalence of Dystocia in Dogs

Selena L. Lane, DVM, DACVECC
University of Georgia

In the Literature

O'Neill DG, O'Sullivan AM, Manson EA, et al. Canine dystocia in 50 UK first-opinion emergency-care veterinary practices: prevalence and risk factors. *Vet Rec.* 2017;181(4):88.

FROM THE PAGE ...

Dystocia is a significant cause of mortality in puppies and can be a life-threatening condition in bitches at parturition. Age, size, and breed are known risk factors.¹⁻³ Understanding more about patient-specific attributes associated with canine dystocia may help veterinary professionals educate the public about breed-specific risk factors.

Data compiled from primary care and emergency veterinary practices were used to provide epidemiologic data of dystocia in bitches in the United Kingdom. Dystocia cases were defined as bitches requiring veterinary intervention at the time of whelping with at least one puppy retained on presentation.

Among 18 758 intact female dogs seen in UK veterinary clinics, 701 dystocia cases were identified, with a 3.7% prevalence rate of emergent dystocia cases in the overall population.

Dystocia was most common in French bulldogs, Boston terriers, pugs, and Chihuahuas. Brachycephalic breeds represented 3 of the 4 breeds at the highest risk for dystocia. Most (94%) affected dogs were purebred bitches. Purebred dogs were found to be 3.4 times more likely to develop dystocia as compared with crossbreed bitches. Identification of at-risk breeds may help veterinary professionals inform breeders and owners about responsible breeding practices and reduce the incidence of dystocia in high-risk breeds.

Body weight also had an impact on risk, with dogs that weighed less than 22 lb or more than 88.2 lb at higher risk as compared with dogs that weighed 44.1 lb to 66 lb. Bitches between 3 and 5.9 years of age were 3.1 times more likely to experience dystocia as compared with younger intact female dogs.

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1 Brachycephalic breeds and Chihuahuas are at increased risk for dystocia, with dogs 3 to 5.9 years of age more frequently affected than younger dogs.
- 2 Owners should be educated about responsible breeding practices and potential for dystocia in at-risk breeds.
- 3 Dystocia is always urgent and may require emergency surgical intervention, regardless of breed and age.

References

1. Gaudet DA. Retrospective study of 128 cases of canine dystocia. *J Am Anim Hosp Assoc.* 1985;21(6):813-818.
2. Bergström A, Nødtvedt A, Lagerstedt AS, Egenvall A. Incidence and breed predilection for dystocia and risk factors for cesarean section in a Swedish population of insured dogs. *Vet Surg.* 2006;35(8):786-791.
3. Münnich A, Küchenmeister U. Dystocia in numbers—evidence-based parameters for intervention in the dog: causes for dystocia and treatment recommendations. *Reprod Domest Anim.* 2009;44(Suppl 2):141-147.

Suggested Reading

- Pretzer SD. Medical management of canine and feline dystocia. *Theriogenology.* 2008;70(3):332-336.
- Smith FO. Guide to emergency interception during parturition in the dog and cat. *Vet Clin Small Anim Pract.* 2012;42(3):489-499.
- Traas AM. Surgical management of canine and feline dystocia. *Theriogenology.* 2008;70(3):337-342.