

Adorable Dogs Are Off the Charts in Popularity, but Watch for This Caveat

People are going wild for these charming companions. What's not to like? They're small, quiet, kid-friendly, adorable and require little exercise. But this overlooked hazard can be much worse if you don't consider these caveats before plunking down money.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The adorable French Bulldog is about to overtake the Labrador Retriever as the most popular dog in the U.K.
- Sadly, these little dogs are prone to a variety of health problems, and the exploding demand for them is creating a boon for poor-quality breeders and puppy smugglers
- Crime syndicates in the U.K. are switching from the illegal drug trade to smuggling French Bulldog puppies bought from foreign farms and sold in Britain for 50 times their purchase price
- A recent U.K. study of over 2,000 Frenchies revealed that almost three quarters had at least one reported health issue; veterinarians and the U.K. Kennel Club are advising prospective owners to do thorough breeder research
- Health issues aside, French Bulldogs make wonderful companions, but it's important to deal only with responsible breeders who are focused on creating healthy dogs as their first priority

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I dearly love French Bulldogs, and apparently so does most of the U.K. In fact, Frenchies are expected to replace Labrador Retrievers as the most popular dog breed across the pond. Sadly, there's little reason to celebrate.

These darling little dogs are vulnerable to a number of health problems, and unfortunately, high demand means high numbers of greedy, disreputable breeders and retailers are jumping into the French Bulldog puppy business. It goes without saying that the health of the dogs isn't a high priority for puppy profiteers.

According to the U.K.'s Telegraph, the number of Frenchies born increased a jaw dropping 7,500% in the 10-year period between 2003 and 2013, with around 12,000 dogs now bred for the British market each year.¹

UK Study Examines the Many Health Challenges French Bulldogs Face

Researchers at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) recently published the U.K.'s largest ever study of over 2,200 French Bulldogs in the journal *Canine Epigenetics and Epidemiology*.² For their study, the researchers analyzed records gathered from over 300 U.K. veterinary clinics. The median age of the dogs studied was 1.3 years.

They found that over a one-year period (which was the first year of life for many of the dogs), 72.4% had at least one recorded disorder. The most common health issues were ear infections, diarrhea and conjunctivitis (inflammation of the surface of the eye). The researchers also learned the breed is particularly prone to three conditions commonly seen in all flat-faced breeds: skin fold dermatitis, cherry eye and brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome.

Interestingly, the study also revealed that male Frenchies were much more prone to health problems. According to lead study author Dr. Dan O'Neill:

*"One of the interesting findings from our research is that male French Bulldogs appear to be less healthy than females. Males were more likely to get [eight] of the 26 most common health problems while there were no issues that females were more likely to get than males."*³

The researchers believe their study may actually underestimate the true number of Frenchies with health problems, since the records they analyzed were only for dogs who saw a veterinarian.

It's very likely many or most of the studied dogs were sicker than similarly affected dogs whose conditions didn't yet warrant a trip to the vet. In addition, the dogs in the study were quite young, and health problems often don't show up or are relatively mild until a dog reaches maturity.

The Frenchie's Distinctive Look Is Both a Blessing and a Curse

The distinctive appearance of the French Bulldog (and other brachy breeds), with their short muzzles and wide, prominent eyes, is probably one of the biggest reasons for their popularity. Unfortunately, it's these very characteristics that also increase the risk for health problems.

According to the RVC's O'Neill, U.K. pet parents with French Bulldogs frequently deal with unexpectedly high veterinary bills because so many of the dogs have health issues.

*"As well as the health risks associated with their extreme physical features," O'Neill told the Telegraph, "the public's insatiable demand for French Bulldog puppies is fuelling a hugely profitable market for unscrupulous dealers and breeders. Many puppies are farmed in very low welfare conditions, often outside of the UK, and then passed off as healthy happy UK-bred puppies. This can contribute to many later behavioral problems, such as aggression."*⁴

O'Neill advises potential pet parents to do careful research on the background of the puppy they're considering, and preferably do business only with members of the Kennel Club's Assured Breeder Scheme, which "... promotes good breeding practice and aims to work together with breeders and buyers to force irresponsible breeders, or puppy farmers, out of business."⁵

French Bulldog Puppy Smuggling Is Big Business in the UK

Along with shady U.K. breeders, the soaring demand for Frenchies has also spawned a lucrative illegal puppy smuggling trade. According to the Telegraph, incredibly, the profits are so high that some crime syndicates have switched from trading in illegal cigarettes and drugs to illegally importing puppies.

French Bulldog puppies can be bought from foreign "farms" for as little as £40 (about \$50) and then sold in Britain for up to £2,000 (over \$2,500). There are thought to be as many as 100 dog-smuggling operations in the U.K., bringing in an estimated 200 puppies every single day. These poor little pups are typically not immunized and often suffer from infections and potentially deadly diseases.

The Kennel Club makes clear that irresponsible breeders, interested only in making money, are producing puppies at a high rate and "... with no regard for their health, temperament or welfare." The RVC study indicates that many of the health problems seen in U.K. Frenchies are the result of the low quality breeding practices typical of puppy farms.

The Kennel Club urges prospective owners to seek out good breeders who are willing to show the breeding environment of the litters they sell. Responsible breeders also explain to prospective buyers the health problems their dog may face, and in addition, they take steps to breed only moderate, non-exaggerated dogs.

5 Reasons People Are Wild for Frenchies

1. **They're uniquely appealing** — What's not to love about those huge bat ears? Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, of course, but the French Bulldog is undeniably a looker.

They're small but sturdily built, with a muscular physique. Frenchies stand from 11 inches to a foot tall at the shoulder. Males weigh 20 to 28 pounds, females 16 to 24 pounds. The French Bulldog coat is short, smooth and shiny. The skin is loose, wrinkled and soft to the touch. Frenchie coats come in a wide range of colors, including fawn, cream and various shades of brindle.

2. **They're sometimes called "frog dog" or "clown dog"** — The French Bulldog has an odd way of sitting with his hind legs spread out — thus the nickname "frog dog." Frenchies are also called "clown dogs" due to their fun-loving temperament.
3. **They're fairly low-energy** — Frenchies don't need tons of exercise, but like all dogs, daily walks and playtime are essential for physical health and mental stimulation. The breed is prone to **heat exhaustion**, so physical exertion should be avoided during the warmest hours of the day.

The French Bulldog is an intelligent free thinker, by turns eager to please or stubbornly independent. Positive reinforcement behavior training is essential, but sessions should be short and fun. These little dogs are very loving, enjoy being the center of attention and need to spend plenty of time with their humans each day.

4. **They're quiet dogs** — The French Bulldog isn't known for barking excessively. Their quiet nature coupled with their small size and low need for exercise makes them a great choice for apartment dwellers. Frenchies do tend to drool quite a bit, and are also known to be gassy and sometimes difficult to **housetrain**.
5. **They generally do very well with children** — Frenchies are sweet-natured, excellent companions. They are patient and affectionate, and females in particular are protective of the children in the family. They make wonderful watchdogs, but they can become territorial without proper guidance. French Bulldogs can also easily live with other pets as long as everyone has been properly socialized.

Is Your Heart Set on Purchasing a Purebred Pup?

Buy only from a local, reputable breeder. Make sure to check his or her background and references. Review the sales contract closely. A reputable breeder will want to meet and interview anyone interested in buying a puppy, as well as be proud to show you the parents, their living environment and their medical records. That's why you won't find

responsible breeders selling to pet stores.

While attending Superzoo this year, I met a breeder who intentionally creates "designer dogs" for people with allergies. She meticulously screens both parents for all potential breed flaws, then creates "fashion mutts" she sells to a long list of buyers who are looking for "healthy hybrids," as she calls them.

Although the topic of designer dogs is very controversial (and I'm not condoning this practice), I applaud this woman for testing for every possible genetic flaw in both breeds, something many breeders still refuse to do. She also welcomes visits to her home, and insists all dogs are returned to her if, for some reason, the owners cannot keep her puppies.

Always visit a breeder's facility in person. You want to see for yourself the conditions in which your puppy was born and raised. I would also insist on meeting the parents (the mother dog, at a minimum). If the breeder won't show you the living conditions in a separate barn, building or part of the house, be suspicious. Additional resources:

- **[How to Find a Responsible Dog Breeder](#)** (Humane Society of the United States)
- **[Finding a Good Dog Breeder](#)** (Dogtime.com)
- **[List of breeders who feed raw and give minimal vaccines](#)**
- **[Dr. Becker's 18-Point Assessment](#)** to determine the health of a breeder's puppies

Sources and References

^{1,4} [The Telegraph, May 3, 2018](#)

² [Canine Genetics and Epidemiology, 2018, 5:3](#)

³ [Science Daily, May 2, 2018](#)

⁵ [The Kennel Club](#)
