



D4 Fatal Dog Bites in Children: Three Cases From Central Virginia

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding child fatalities due to dog bites in central Virginia.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing a generalized description of child fatalities due to dog bites in central Virginia, which may prove useful in determining how to prevent fatal dog bites in children and determining when situations involving dogs and children can prove more likely to have a fatal outcome.

In the past twelve years, three cases of fatal dog bites involving children have been investigated. The similarities and differences between these cases will be discussed in three separate case reports.

The first case occurred in 2000 involving a 6-year-old white male who was airlifted to a hospital and later died after suffering lethal dog bites to the head and neck. The victim had gone outside by himself to feed the family dog. The bites to the head were so severe that part of the skull became visible. The dog involved in this death was a wolf-German shepherd mix.

The next two cases were more recent. The case from 2009 involved a 1-year-old white female who was left alone and wandered outside to where her family's dog was chained. She sustained multiple puncture wounds to the neck. The dog involved in this attack was a pit bull.

The third case from 2011 involved a 5-month-old white male who had been left alone in the same room as the family's dog. The victim was found unresponsive after family heard growling. The victim sustained multiple lacerations to the forehead. The dog involved in this death is a rescued bulldog.

In all three cases, the events were not witnessed. Additionally, all the victims were last seen alive shortly before the attack and were not found until the child either cried out during the attack or family members heard or noticed something out of place and found the child right after the attack. In all three cases, the trigger for the attack was unknown. Three similarities emerged between the three cases: (1) all three dogs are stereotypically labeled "attack" breeds; (2) the dogs involved had no known previous violent history and no previous incidents of aggression; and, (3) all three victims had injuries to the head and neck areas. One difference between all three cases was the age difference; the victims ranged in age from five months to six years.

Further investigation into these cases will examine the living situations of the families involved, the type of dog involved in the attack, the location of the incident, and the location, depth, and severity of the injuries. Future investigation will include investigation of fatal dog attacks from the other three districts of the Virginia Medical Examiner system. The presentation of these three cases from the central region of Virginia will eventually be part of a larger study of fatal dog attacks involving children in the entire state of Virginia.

Dog Attack, Fatal, Child Investigation