

Pitbull Mauling Deaths in Detroit

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Abstract: Between the years 1987 and 2005, there were 6 deaths reported in Wayne County, Michigan, associated with pitbull dog attacks. This article discusses the age incidence, scene investigation, nature of the injuries, and discussion relative to fatal dog attacks, an unusual accidental type of death.

Key Words: mauling, pitbull, fatal dog bite
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The following 6 cases from the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office in Detroit, Michigan, involve accidental blunt force injuries sustained in fatal pitbull dog attacks. The findings seen at autopsy, in general, consist of multiple lacerations, sets of puncture wounds, and extensive scalp avulsions, primarily sustained to the head and neck region of the body, which result in extensive mutilating injuries to the body and death results from exsanguination. There is a tendency for these animals to attack the neck region and destroy the blood vessels of the neck and cause extensive avulsions of the scalp and ears. In the majority of the cases, the victims were children or elderly. Four of the victims were children (age range 2 months to 6 years), 1 victim was a middle-aged adult (age 44), and 1 victim was an elderly adult (age 91). Three of the victims were male and 3 of the victims were female. Three of the victims were white and 3 of the victims were black.

MATERIALS

The following 6 cases of death caused by pitbull mauling are presented, which were all investigated and autopsied between the years 1987 and 2005 at the Office of the Wayne County Medical Examiner, Detroit, Michigan. A thorough scene investigation and a complete autopsy with documentation of external and internal injuries were performed in all cases. Complete toxicological screening was performed on all cases. In some cases, the animal(s) involved in the attack were shot and the gastric contents were recovered from the

dead animal. The cases will be discussed in sequence in an order according to increasing age.

CASE REPORTS

Case 1

A 2-month old white male infant was found decapitated on the living room floor. A 12-year-old sibling was sleeping on the sofa in the same room and awoke because the baby was crying. The infant was attacked by the family pitbull, who was previously stray and recently acquired by the family. Autopsy revealed decapitation with bite marks surrounding the ragged tissue margins on the neck. The dog was destroyed and examination of the gastric contents revealed multiple fragments of bone, skin and soft tissue, the nose, 1 globe, and both ears of the infant. Toxicology was negative (Figs. 1A and 1B—ref. case 9589-87—black and white photographs).

Case 2

A 1-year-old white male child was placed on the kitchen floor by his 54-year-old grandmother, who was babysitting the child. The grandmother stepped out of the room momentarily and returned to find the child being attacked by the family pitbull. The salient autopsy findings include multiple lacerations and sets of puncture wounds to the face, neck, and arms. Extensive scalp and facial avulsions were also present. Internally, there was a puncture wound to the right internal jugular vein. The animal forcefully attacked the neck region of the body, causing fracture dislocation of the vertebral spine at the level of C7–T1. There were also punctures, lacerations, and crushing injury to the larynx. Toxicology was negative (Figs. 2A, 2B, 2C, and 2D—ref. case 04-3275—images 11, 19, 21, and 28).

Case 3

A 1-year-old male child was attacked while playing in the front yard of his home by 2 pitbull dogs who were roaming the streets freely. The mother had stepped inside the home briefly to answer the telephone and saw her son being attacked through the window.

Autopsy revealed a large gaping hole in the right side of the neck with numerous puncture wounds to the right main carotid and right jugular vein, the esophagus, and trachea. The entire back was covered by scratch marks and puncture wounds. Multiple lacerations were present on the face, the chest, and the groins. Toxicology was negative (Fig. 3—ref. case 93-8688—kodachrome).

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