

Response to 2023.EC6.9: Incident and Operational Review of Serious Dog Attacks

Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS)

Toronto Public Health (TPH)

ECDC - February 20, 2024



Overview of 2023.EC6.9 Directives

In [2023.EC6.9](#), ECDC requested a report in Q1 2024 on:

- **A review of a dangerous dog incident on July 30, 2023**, as well as the procedures and processes of Toronto Animal Services (TAS) for the compliance and enforcement of Dangerous Dog Orders (DDOs), including in the immediate aftermath of a serious dog attack. The review should include:
 - existing procedures for managing a severe dog mauling incident;
 - public notification of a DDO; requirements and conditions of a DDO;
 - expedited removal of animals involved in the most serious attacks;
 - proactive enforcement and monitoring of dangerous dogs to ensure compliance;
 - response to serious dog mauling vs. a dog bite; current emergency access to a Justice of the Peace and recommendations for provincial changes to allow TAS to obtain emergency hearings after a severe dog attack; and
 - the protocol that has been set up between TAS and 311 for residents reporting dangerous dog matters.
- **A review of the procedures and processes of Toronto Public Health (TPH)** in relation to investigations in the immediate aftermath of a serious dog attack.
- Comments from the City Solicitor on options to make **charges under Dangerous Dog legislation known to the public**.

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Serious Dog Attack Investigations

Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS)

- Toronto Animal Services (TAS) within MLS **investigates all dangerous acts committed by a dog.**
- TAS enforces requirements under the Animals By-law, which requires owners to take precautions to prevent their dog from engaging in a dangerous act and sets out criteria for issuing a Dangerous Dog Order (DDO).
 - **Requirements of a DDO:** dog must be muzzled, microchipped, and is prohibited from off-leash areas; warning sign posted on the owner's premises; City keeps a photo of the dog on file; and socialization/obedience training to be conducted. Once issued, DDO must be complied with immediately.
- TAS may also commence proceedings under Ontario's *Dog Owners' Liability Act* (DOLA), which makes dog owners strictly liable for damage/injury caused by their dog.
 - This may include a request for a Control Order or destruction of the dog (to be signed off by a Justice of Peace). DOLA proceedings take additional time as they occur in the courts.

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Serious Dog Attack Investigations

Toronto Public Health (TPH)

- **Fulfills requirements** under the *Health Promotion and Protection Act* (HPPA) **to prevent the transmission of rabies.**
- Investigates dog attacks where rabies may have been transmitted.
- During an investigation, Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) prioritize investigations based on the risk of rabies transmission and will:
 - Conduct a rabies risk assessment;
 - Order confinement, observation, and testing of animals to determine rabies status;
 - Determine compliance with, and enforce vaccination for animals to prevent infection and spread of the disease to people, and;
 - Provide rabies vaccines to health care providers to vaccinate people as appropriate.

Response to Incident on July 30, 2023

Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS)

- On July 30, 2023, Animal Control Officers responded as soon as possible after the incident was reported to 311.
- TPS advised TAS that the two dogs involved in the incident had been secured inside the owner's residence. The owner voluntarily had them euthanized by a veterinarian.
- Charges against the dog owner have been filed under the *Dog Owner's Liability Act* (DOLA) and the Animals Bylaw.
- During the incident, 911 was called for emergency medical services, however they were incorrectly advised to call 311.

Toronto Public Health (TPH)

- The incident was reported to TPH on July 31, 2023.
- TPH staff, based on their rabies risk assessment, delivered rabies vaccine for post-exposure prophylaxis to health care provider and ensured compliance from the animal owner to (a) confine implicated dogs, (b) euthanize and test the implicated dogs for rabies, and (c) confine dogs living with the implicated dogs to observe them for rabies.
- TPH's investigation followed required steps in written procedures and guidance documents.

Review of Procedures

Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS)

As directed, MLS undertook a comprehensive review of its processes and procedures:

- **Incident reporting:** Residents can report a dog bite or attack through all available 311 channels 24 hours a day, seven days a week. MLS and 311 recently updated the knowledge base and script for dog bites/attacks. 911 should be contacted to respond if dogs are at large, it is an emergency or medical attention is required.
- **Priority response:** TAS triages all reports of dangerous dog acts and prioritizes requests involving severe incidents. If the dogs involved in the incident are at-large, TAS will respond within two hours.
- **Off-leash areas:** TAS receives a high number of requests to investigate relatively minor dangerous dog acts that occur when dogs interact off-leash in designated off-leash areas and in non-designated areas (e.g., sports fields, school yards).
- **Compliance:** TAS follows up with dog owners after a DDO has been issued to ensure compliance. In cases of non-compliance, TAS may issue an Order to Comply or proceed with legal action. Following the initial compliance checks, enforcement of DDOs is complaints-based.

Review of Procedures (continued)

Municipal Licensing and Standards (MLS)

- **Warning sign:** While dog owners are required to post a warning sign, there is currently no standardized requirements for what the sign must look like.
- **Training:** In some cases, owners are unable to afford for their dog to receive socialization / obedience training if issued a DDO.
- **Facilities:** TAS has limited facilities to house impounded dangerous dogs. Dogs may be required to wait in a shelter for months to years due to the time it can take for DOLA cases to proceed through the provincial court system.
- **Education:** Proactive public education campaign will support enforcement and compliance with the goal of reducing the occurrence of dangerous acts. There is a need to change public behaviour and increase awareness of why dogs need to be leashed, how owners can prevent dangerous dog acts and how people and children can safely interact with dogs.
- **Public notice:** DDOs are not currently posted on the City's website. Details of orders and whether certain dogs are subject to orders are available at request on a case-by-case basis.

Review of Procedures

Toronto Public Health (TPH)

Methods:

- Compiled a list of relevant procedures and guidance documents.
- Identified where requirements of TPH procedures need additional instructions for staff.

Findings:

- TPH's *Investigating Animal-to-Human Exposures Procedure* goes beyond requirements of the Ontario Ministry of Health protocol.
- Although TPH inspectors appropriately confine animals based on the information they receive and the instructions in the procedure, the *Investigating Animal-to-Human Exposures Procedure* needed to be modified to specifically outline instructions to Public Health Inspectors to ask about total animals living in a home, and the data system did not have specific fields for this information.
- Additional details would be beneficial in the information pet owners receive when confining their animal for 10 days to observe for signs of rabies.
- There is an opportunity to build on 2022 improvements to further formalize collaboration with TAS.

Actions to Improve Processes and Procedures

Staff have initiated the following program improvements and are actively working on implementation:

MLS is working to post a **public list of dogs** that have received dangerous dog orders through Open Data

MLS developed a **standardized dangerous dog warning sign** to be posted on the owner's premises

MLS is exploring opportunities to provide access to **discounted socialization/obedience training** for owners of dangerous dogs

Formally **request that the Province amend DOLA** to (i) more promptly hear matters and (ii) support municipalities in recovering costs of sheltering dangerous dogs

MLS is requesting funds (up to \$500k) for a robust dangerous dog **public education campaign** with the goal of supporting prevention of dog bites/attacks

MLS has **updated prioritization procedures** of dangerous dog acts to reduce focus on minor incidents occurring in off-leash areas and prioritize more serious incidents

Actions to Improve Processes and Procedures (continued)

TAS, 311, TPS, and TPH continue to engage to confirm respective mandates, roles, and responsibilities for dangerous dog acts and to ensure clear communication with the public on response to incidents

In addition to existing processes, TPH and TAS are **enhancing partnership and information sharing** at routine intervals

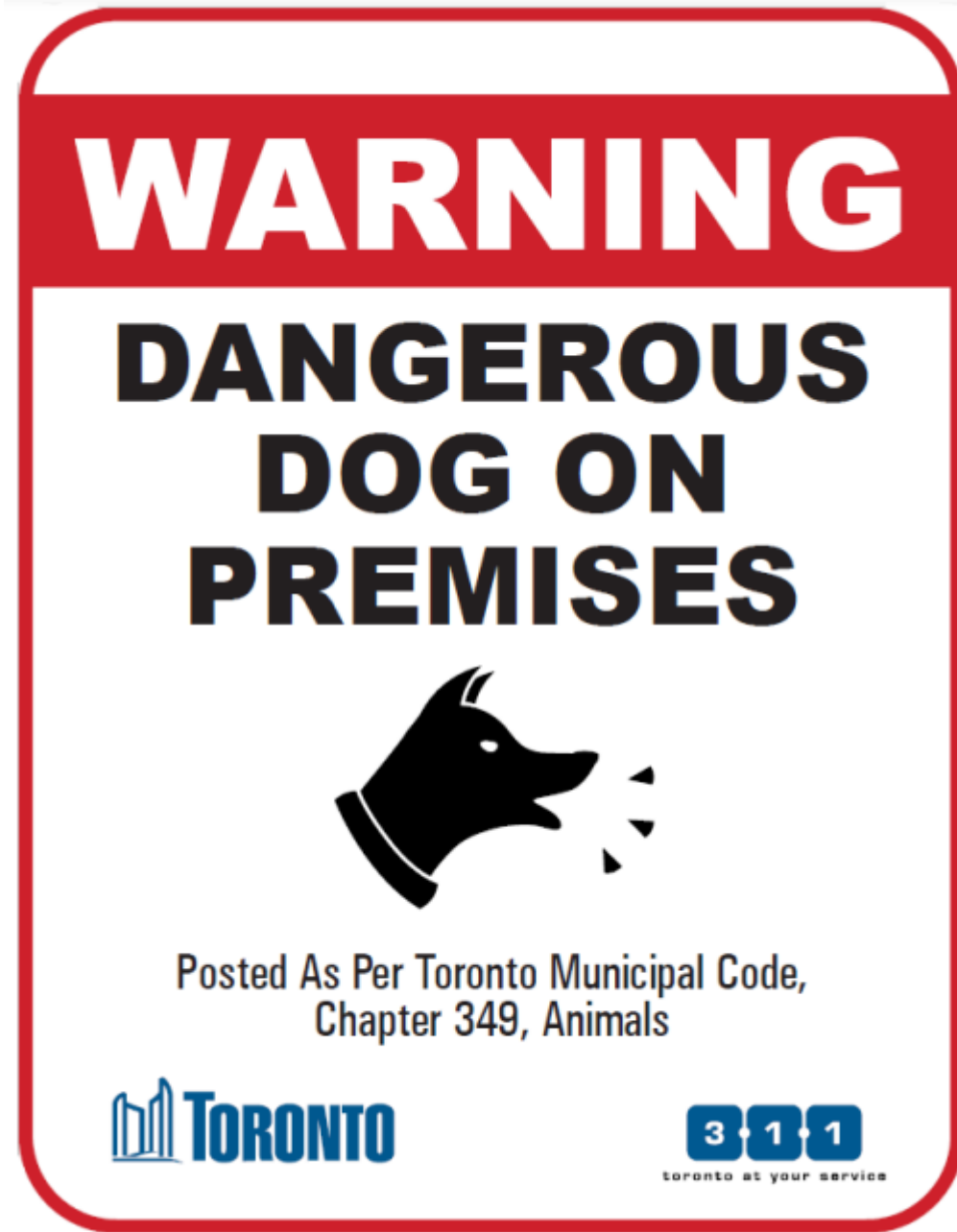
TPH and TAS are initiating a new **dedicated table to support a coordinated response** while investigating serious dog attacks which may be conducive to rabies transmission

TPH has modified procedures and systems to ensure **information regarding total numbers of animals in homes** is consistently collected and recorded

TPH is **enhancing instructions for pet owners** on how to comply with confinement requirements under the HPPA

DRAFT Standardized Dangerous Dog Warning Sign

Note: sign is in draft form and may be amended prior to finalization (in consultation with the Strategic Public & Employee Communications Division)



Next Steps

- Toronto Animal Services (TAS) to hire additional Animal Control Officers, as provided for in Budget 2024 ([2024.MPB.15.1](#))
- TAS to post public list of dogs that have received dangerous dog orders (n=~450) on Open Data
- TAS to finalize and distribute standardized dangerous dog warning sign
- TAS and TPH continue to implement other recommended process and procedure improvements