



THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



COMMISSIONERS:

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Andrew E. Dinniman

CHESTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Chester County Govt. Services Center
601 Westtown Road, Suite 290
P.O. Box 2747
West Chester, PA 19380-0990
610-344-6225 FAX: 610-344-6727
www.chesco.org/health

JOHN P. MAHER, M.D., M.P.H.
County Health Director

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For further information contact
Patricia Donnelly at 610-344-6259

OFFICIALS WARN OF DOG BITES

County Health Department officials today joined forces with the State Dog Law Enforcement Officer to warn residents about the chronically high incidence of animal bites, specifically the high occurrence of dog bites, in our county, and to provide some very important advice to dog owners.

Recent notoriety about serious dog bites here was underscored by the recent felony convictions of the owners of two dogs involved in a fatal dog bite attack in California.

According to Chester County Health Department (CCHD) statistics, there have been 1,461 dog bites in Chester County for the period 1999 to 2001. That number itself seems very high and, according to County Health Director Doctor John Maher, it places dog bites either first or second among all reported diseases every year. Even then, Dr. Maher commented, those numbers represent only the "reported" dog bites. "This is sort of a tip of the iceberg phenomenon," he said, noting that the actual number is probably higher.

Sadly, children make up the group most affected by dog bites, with 31% occurring in those aged 10 years and under. Some 40% of those bites are to the child's face.

Dr. Maher reminds everyone that we are only now entering the worst part of the so-called “biting season” here. With the warmer weather, children are outdoors playing and dogs are often allowed to run loose. In addition, animals also tend to be more aggressive this time of year because of the mating season.

Dr. Maher also released statistical graphs indicating the 10 municipalities with the highest numbers of dog bites and those with the highest rates of dog bites (bites per 100,000 population) as well as the 10 with the lowest numbers and rates. If all parties involved would work together to bring those 10 highest rates down to the current county average, Dr. Maher feels we as a community could significantly reduce the trauma as well as the medical care costs and litigation costs so often associated with these biting incidents.

State Dog Law Enforcement Officer Maureen Devlin-Siddons agreed with the concerns being expressed, and reminded Chester County residents who own, or have in their possession, a dog 3 months of age or older that:

- 2002 dog licenses were legally due on January 1st, and failure to have a current license for your dog can result in a \$300 fine.
- Dog licenses are sold at the County Treasurer’s Office in Suite 120, North Wing of the Courthouse (phone 610-344-6370), the SPCA facility (phone 610-692-6113), and a number of other sites. Information as to these sites, and a downloadable dog license application can be accessed on the CCHD’s website go to: www.chesco.org/health/health.html, click on “Special Health Issues” and then “dog licenses”.
- A dog license will help owners recover dogs which stray from their property and become lost. It can also help identify an unfamiliar dog which bites someone.

- Under both State law and County Health regulations all dogs 3 months of age must be vaccinated against rabies. This vaccine must be administered by a licensed veterinarian and kept current.
- Any questions about licenses or dog-related problems can be addressed to Maureen Devlin Siddons, State Dog Warden, at 610-918-9078.

Lastly, CCHD's Public Health Educator, Pat Donnelly, wanted to be sure that dog owners know and follow the duties of responsible pet ownership. The underlying cause of many dog bites often lies with the animals and their owners. Research must be done into the breed which is most suitable to one's lifestyle. Many breeds make excellent guard dogs but may not be good or safe around children.

Puppies may be small and cute when first purchased, but grow into large animals. For them to grow into well-behaved adult dogs, a lot of work is necessary. Purchase the animal from a responsible breeder, one who is concerned about the animal's temperament. Time and energy are required to train the dog. Socialization in multiple situations, and obedience training, are absolute necessities.

If the dog is not to be bred, neutering or spaying is important, both to keep down the numbers of unwanted animals and strays, and because neutered dogs are less aggressive or likely to bite.

Unfortunately, even with the best training, the very nature of children's actions may trigger an instinctive predator-prey reaction in some dogs. Running, screaming, playing children may trigger the reaction. Pulling the dog's ears or stepping on its tail can also trigger a reflex bite reaction. Young children should not be left alone with a dog, especially a dog to whom they are strangers. Children must be taught to be cautious around all animals, even those which are tied or confined.

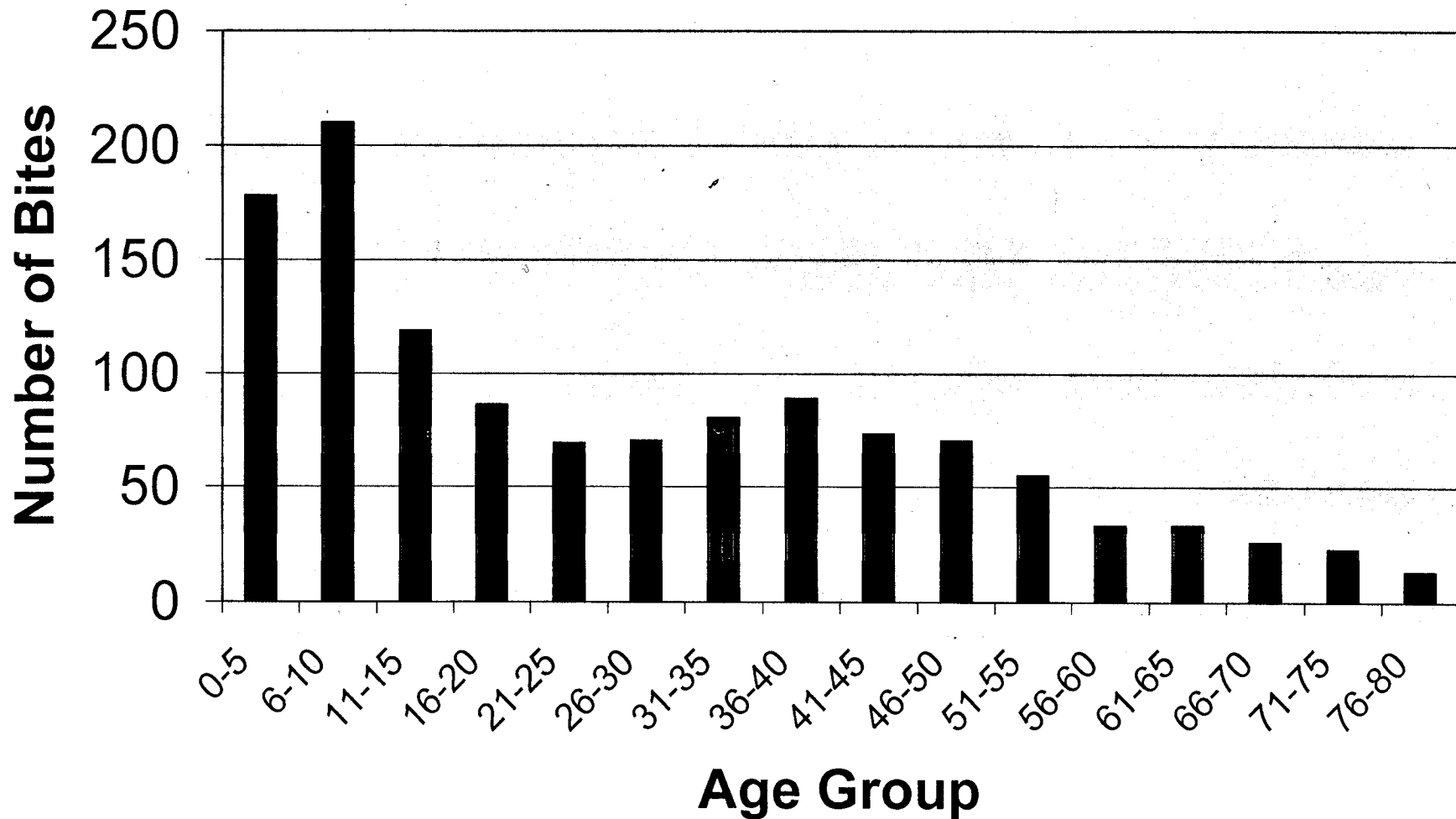
On the other hand, dog owners must know and comply with state and local dog laws, especially those dealing with using a leash, confining the dog to the property, and having the dog under direct control at all times. Dogs have sometimes been euthanized simply because of the owner's failure to abide by the rules.

Bites which do occur despite all these precautionary measures must be reported to the local police and to the Chester County Health Department, at 610-344-6463. The owner will then receive directions about confining the dog and having a Veterinarian either certify its health prior to release from confinement, or determine if the dog might be rabid.

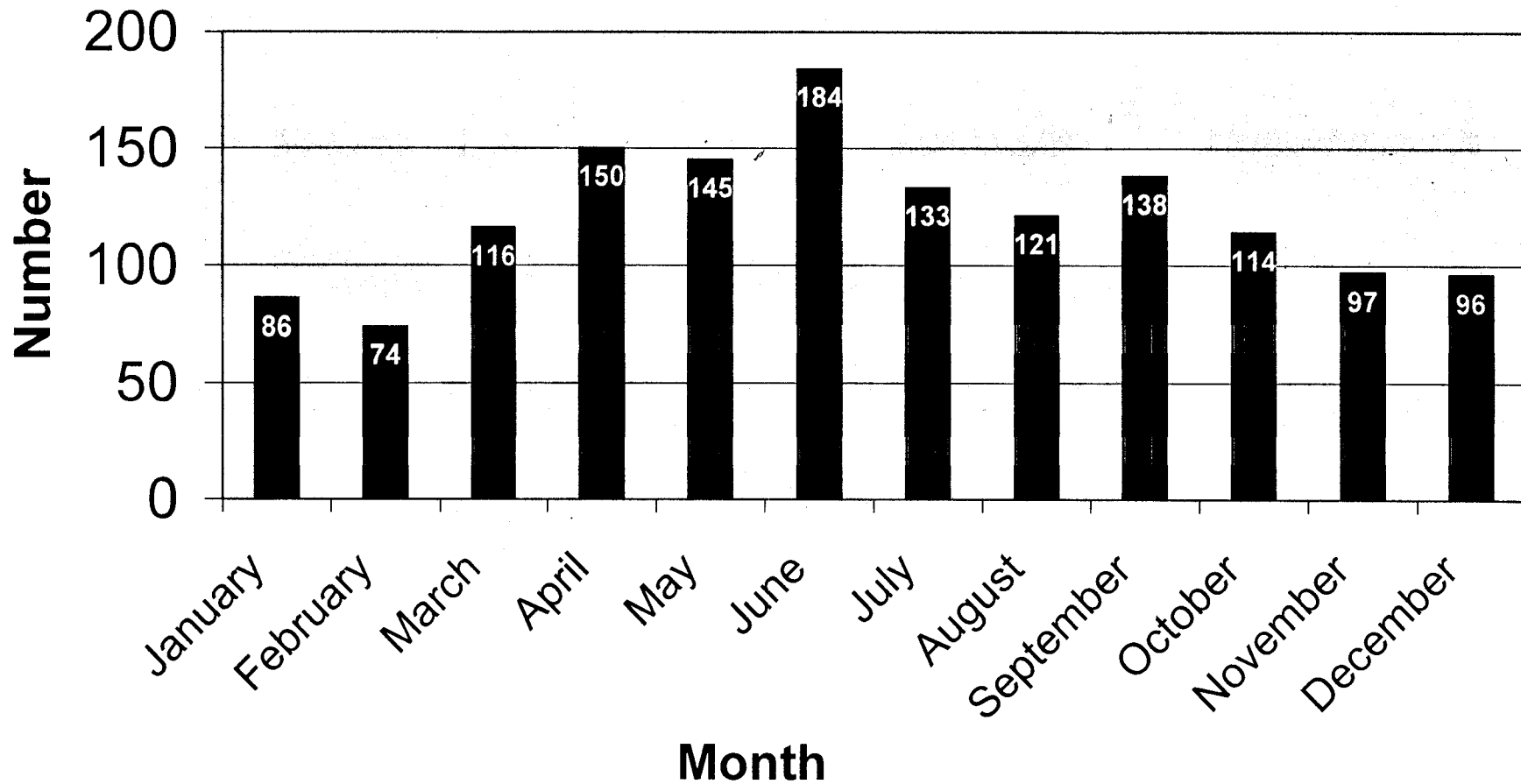
For additional information, contact Ms. Pat Donnelly, Public Health Educator, at the Chester County Health Department, at 610-344-6259.

Enclosure: graphs (5)

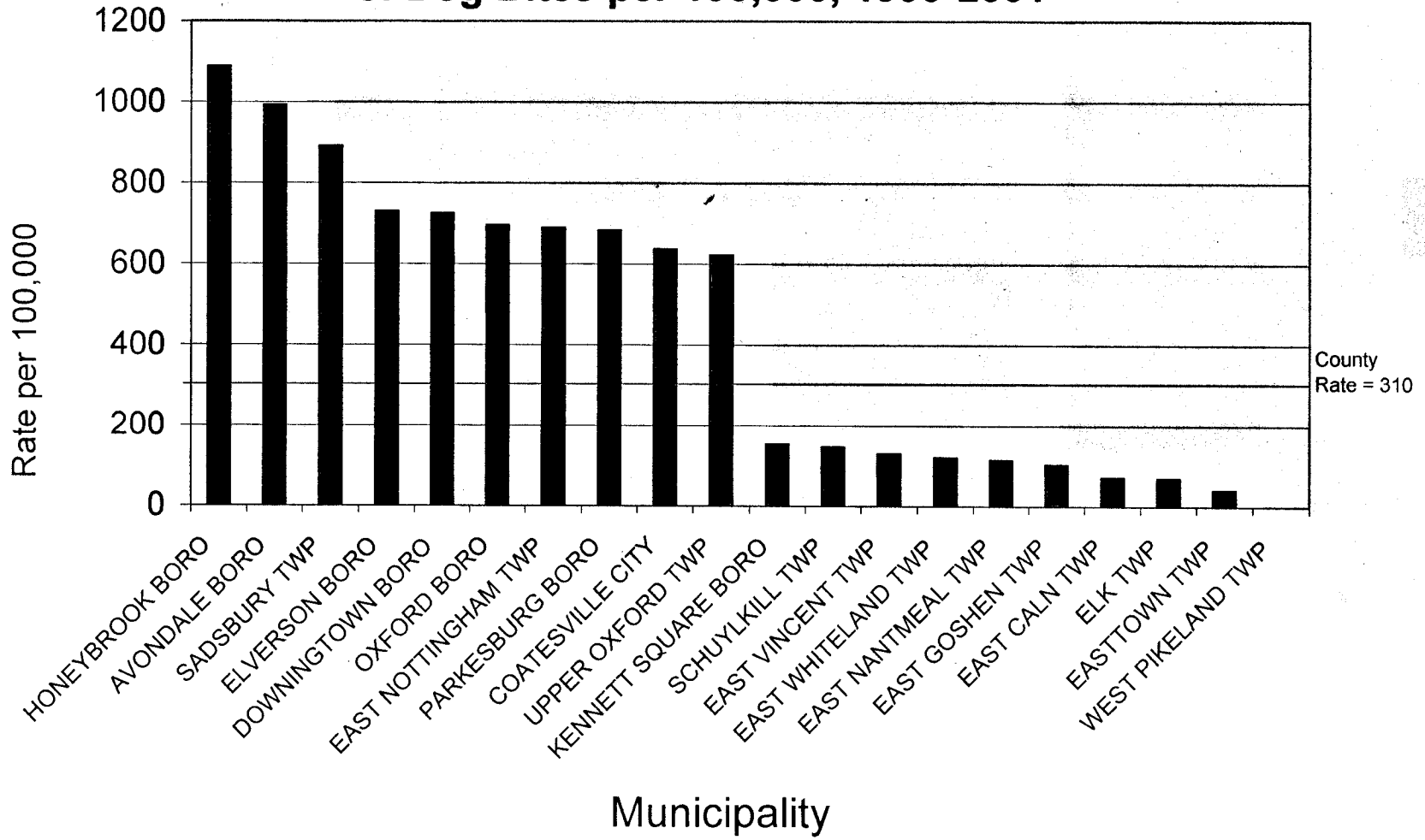
Dog Bites by Age Group, 1999-2001



Chester County Reported Dog Bites 1999-2001 by Month of Year



Chester County Municipalities with 10 Highest and 10 Lowest Rates of Dog Bites per 100,000, 1999-2001



Dog Bite Locations for Ages 0-10, 1999-2001



Chester County Municipalities with Highest and Lowest Number of Reported Dog Bites, 1999-2001

