

Pet-Related Falls Injure Thousands, CDC Says

Study finds more than 86,000 hurt every year tripping over cats and dogs.

Posted: March 31, 2009, 3 a.m. EDT

Fracture rates due to tripping over a cat or dog were higher in people 75 and older, according to the CDC study. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says more than 86,000 people are injured each year in falls caused by their cats and dogs.

That's an average of nearly 30 out of every 100,000 people, the agency said in its study, released Friday.

The study provides the first national estimates of fall injuries associated with cats and dogs, which account for about 1 percent of the nation's 8 million fall-related injuries treated by emergency departments each year.

Overall, the CDC estimated 86,629 fall injuries each year were associated with cats and dogs, with dogs causing nearly 88 percent of the injuries. This number is likely underestimated because it did not include injuries that were not treated at all or were treated at home, physician offices, or nonemergency outpatient facilities.

Nearly 62 percent of dog-related injuries occurred inside or immediately outside the home. Thirty-one percent of those cases involved falling or tripping over a dog. Most falls involving cats occurred at home, with 66 percent due to the person falling or tripping over the cat.

Women were more than twice as likely as men to seek medical attention at an emergency department due to a pet-related fall, the government said.

The most common primary injury diagnosis was fracture (30.7 percent), followed by contusions/abrasions (26.2 percent), strain/sprain (18.8 percent) laceration (12.8 percent) and internal injury (4.2 percent).

Although injuries were most frequent among people under 14 or between 35 and 54, injury rates, especially fracture rates, were most common among people older than 75. Because hip fractures can lead to long-term functional impairments for older adults, this could be an area of concern.

The CDC did note, however, that "prevention measures for fall injuries should be balanced against the known health benefits of pet ownership." Simple awareness that pets and their items could cause falls could help reduce falls, the agency said.

The study looked at unintentional, nonfatal fall injuries treated in emergency departments from 2001 to 2006, as recorded by the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System All Injury Program, operated by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. The CDC estimates were based on 7,456 cases that involved dogs or cats.