

SC Pulls Up States Over Stray Dog Menace and Public Safety Concerns

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Stray Dog Menace Latest News

- The Supreme Court has dismissed all challenges related to stray dog management and strongly criticised states for remaining passive while citizens face increasing dog attack risks in public spaces.
- The Court observed that India's stray dog crisis has reached alarming levels due to poor implementation of the **Animal Birth Control (ABC) framework**, introduced in 2001. It noted a serious lack of infrastructure, irregular sterilisation and vaccination drives, and weak institutional mechanisms.
- Linking the issue to **Article 21**, the Court held that the right to life includes the right to move freely in public spaces without fear of attack, stressing that children and elderly citizens cannot be left vulnerable.
- It also warned authorities that failure to follow court directions and **Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI)** guidelines could invite contempt proceedings and disciplinary action.

What Triggered the Supreme Court's Intervention

- The Supreme Court took up the stray dog issue suo motu in July 2025 after reports of a 6-year-old girl in New Delhi dying from a dog bite and suspected rabies infection.
- The Court described the rise in dog attacks and rabies-related deaths as a serious public safety concern.

Initial Directions by the Court

- The case was first heard by a bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, which in August 2025 directed civic authorities in Delhi-NCR to:
 - Remove stray dogs from public spaces
 - Shift them to shelters
 - Avoid releasing them back onto the streets
- The Court emphasised that citizens should be able to move freely without fear of dog attacks.
- The order triggered protests from animal welfare organisations and dog feeders, who argued that the directions violated the ABC Rules, 2023. Under these rules:
 - Stray dogs must be sterilised and vaccinated
 - They should then be released back into the same area from where they were picked up
- Following petitions seeking recall of the order, the matter was referred to a three-judge bench led by Justice Vikram Nath.

Modified Position of the Court

- The Supreme Court later softened its earlier stance and:
 - Restored the existing sterilisation-and-release policy under the ABC Rules
 - Allowed authorities to keep rabid or aggressive dogs in shelters
 - Prohibited feeding stray dogs in public places outside designated feeding zones

Key Arguments in Previous Supreme Court Hearings

- Resident welfare groups and families of dog bite victims argued that authorities had failed to control the rising stray dog menace.
- Animal welfare organisations opposed large-scale removal of stray dogs, arguing that such a strategy would be **ineffective and unsustainable**.

Expansion of the Court's Review and Interim Direction

- Over time, the hearings expanded beyond immediate dog attack incidents into a broader review of how states and municipal bodies were implementing sterilisation, vaccination, and shelter management policies.
- In November 2025, the Supreme Court issued an interim order directing:
 - States and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to remove stray animals from highways
 - Removal of stray animals from schools, hospitals, and other institutional premises
 - Fencing of such sensitive premises to improve public safety

Supreme Court's Directions on Stray Dog Management

- The Supreme Court directed every district in India to establish at least one fully functional ABC centre.
- States and Union Territories have been asked to further expand this infrastructure based on population density and local needs.
- The Court ordered authorities to:
 - Ensure adequate availability of anti-rabies medicines
 - Strengthen veterinary services
 - Improve vaccination infrastructure for effective stray animal management
- The Court directed the NHA and state governments to develop a coordinated mechanism for handling stray animals on highways and expressways.
- This should include: Transport vehicles for animal relocation; Shelter facilities; Coordination with animal welfare organisations.

Action Against Dangerous Animals

- The Court clarified that authorities may take legally permitted action, including euthanasia, in cases involving:
 - Rabid dogs
 - Incurably ill animals
 - Demonstrably dangerous or aggressive dogs posing a threat to human life
- Such measures must strictly comply with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the ABC Rules.
- To ensure implementation, the Supreme Court directed all High Courts to initiate suo motu continuing proceedings for regular monitoring of compliance with these directions.

What the ABC Rules Provide

- The Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, 2023, framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, identify sterilisation and anti-rabies vaccination as the primary methods for controlling stray dog populations.
- The Rules require that stray dogs, after sterilisation and vaccination, be **released back into the same area** from where they were picked up, based on the understanding that stray dogs are territorial animals.
- The ABC Rules prohibit: Indiscriminate killing of stray dogs; Arbitrary relocation of stray dogs.
- Euthanasia is permitted only in specific cases involving: Rabid dogs; Terminally ill animals; Fatally injured animals.

Constitutional Dimensions of the Debate

- **Animal Welfare Perspective** – Animal welfare groups relied on Article 51A(g) of the Constitution, which places a fundamental duty on citizens to show compassion towards living creatures.
- **Public Safety Perspective** – Unchecked stray dog populations violate citizens' rights under: Article 19 (Right to move freely) and Article 21 (Right to life and personal safety).

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