

The Hypoallergenic Dog Myth

No dog breed is entirely hypoallergenic.

By Sally Deneen

Which dog breeds are ideal for allergy sufferers? None.

That's what the experts say if you're definitely allergic to dogs and want a total guarantee.

No dog is non-allergenic, says Bruce Bochner, M.D., director of the Johns Hopkins Asthma & Allergy Center and professor of medicine at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

"I am aware of no hypoallergenic status that can be attributed to any dog, no matter what the breed," says Ralph Richardson, DVM, of Kansas State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

"Some breeds have more dander than others, but someone who is allergic to dogs is allergic to dogs," says Linda Boyer, executive director of the Baltimore-based Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

Some breeders of designer dogs tout that their animals are good for allergy sufferers. But experts say there's no such thing for people who actually are allergic to dogs. The trouble is the dander. Dander is smaller than a head of a pin and shed by every dog, whether or not he sheds fur, Boyer points out.

Her advice: Don't assume you're allergic to dogs. Get tested by an allergist. Dust mites or other allergens may be the true sources of your sniffles, and they can hide in the same dust bunnies as dog dander.

If it turns out that your pooch does prompt your stuffy nose and sniffles, keep him out of your bed and bedroom, Boyer says. Choose hardwood floors, not dander-trapping carpet. Bathe your dog weekly. "In general, if you have an allergy to an animal — dogs or cats — it is not wise to have one in your house," Boyer says. "However, lots of people who have allergies feel it's worth the sacrifice to keep the animal."

If you plan to get a dog despite your dander allergy, spend plenty of time with him before you take him home. The amount of dander a dog will shed varies even within a single breed.

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- Designer Dogs Mix It Up -