



Understanding Health Testing results

All dogs, whether pure-bred or mixed can suffer from health problems. Some of these health problems are hereditary, meaning that they are passed on to the puppies from their parents.

A good breeder will always be aiming to produce happy and healthy puppies that make great family pets and companions. They will want the puppies they have bred to live long and healthy lives.

Breeders of pure-bred dogs are usually very aware of potential health problems in their breed and make sure they reduce the risks of passing these diseases on by health testing any potential breeding animals before they go on to produce puppies.

Responsible breeding involves testing any potential breeding animals for known health issues, and making informed and considered breeding decisions with the health and welfare of both the parents and the puppies as a priority.

What types of testing are there?

Health testing for breeding animals may include:

» DNA tests

Because an animal's DNA does not change, DNA tests only need to be done once. DNA is considered the gold standard for screening breeding animals - BUT not all diseases have a DNA test, and some diseases have a genetic component, but there are other factors that influence whether or not the animal goes on to develop the disease.

Depending on the testing done, there may be one or two specific DNA results, or results from a larger 'panel' type test.

Individuals are often classified as 'Clear' - no copies of the gene, 'Carrier' - one copy of the gene, and 'Affected' - two copies of the gene. In most cases, a 'Carrier' of a trait will not go on to develop the disease, they just have the potential to pass it on to their progeny.

» X-Ray based 'Scoring' (eg: hip, elbow or spinal scoring)

These tests are usually only done once, but they may have a minimum testing age to allow for the animal to fully mature and for the skeleton to finish developing.

There are different scoring systems, but in the majority of cases, the lower the score the better.

» Screening tests

These tests need to be repeated throughout the animal's life as they are actually looking for signs of actual disease developing in the individual.

Examples may include yearly heart checks, yearly eye exams or biannual respiratory function assessment.

In brachycephalic breeds (squishy faced or short nosed breeds) a Respiratory Function Grading test ensures that potential breeding animals can perform normal exercise, and do not have signs of airway obstruction that could lead to serious health issues or impact their welfare longer term.

All of these screening tests require a specialist veterinarian such as a cardiologist or ophthalmologist, or an approved assessor for proper certification.





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How can you make sure you are buying the healthiest puppy you can?

Regardless of the breed or mix of breeds you are looking at, you need to know what questions to ask, and how to make sure the information provided by the breeder is legitimate.

Although many people spend ages researching the breed that will best align with their lifestyle and expectations, sometimes a litter or puppy might become available and decisions need to be made quickly.

1. Don't get bamboozled

When it comes to health testing results, it can seem a bit overwhelming to understand all of the terminology and 'jargon' associated with breeder advertisements.

Good breeders will take the time to explain what the health testing is for, and what the results mean. They want you to understand the steps that they are taking to ensure your new puppy is as healthy as possible.

Unfortunately, puppy farmers and puppy scammers have jumped on the health testing bandwagon, often using vague and misleading terminology in their advertisements to try to look more legitimate.

A quick search of sites such as Gumtree will find statements such as '*DNA tested clear of all health issues*' or both '*parents vet checked, DNA tested clear*', '*parents DNA tested to ensure the puppies can not be affected by any hereditary disease*'.

Unscrupulous breeders take advantage of the fact that the general public doesn't have a great understanding of DNA testing or health screening tests – they just know it is something 'good breeders' do.

A statement of '*clear of all hereditary disease*' based on a DNA test alone should ring alarm bells.

The reality is that there are many breed-specific diseases without a DNA test and some common health issues are not able to be detected until later in life even with regular vet checks.

2. Do your homework

If you are interested in a particular breed of dog, spend some time on the internet looking at Breed Club websites.

Most have a page dedicated to explaining the health issues may affect the breed, and what types of testing breeders should be doing. You need to understand what the tests are for and what the results mean.

Other good places to look are the [UK Kennel Club](#) website and the [American Kennel Club](#) website, both of which have some great resources relating to health testing and breeds.

If you are thinking about a mixed breed - you need to do twice the amount of homework as you need to know the diseases that are common in **both** breeds!

Breeders who are breeding mixed breed dogs are often starting out with breeding animals that pure-bred breeders did not think were suitable for breeding. They may also not take time to do health testing on the misconception that '*mixed breeds are healthier*' - when in fact they may be combining the health problems of both breeds.

3. Ask your breeder lots of questions

A reputable breeder will be able to tell you the health issues that have been recognised in their breed (or breeds in the case of mixes) and will be able to discuss what health tests are available to help screen potential parents before any breeding occurs. They should also be happy to give you a copy of the results of any tests for their breeding animals.

If they can't answer questions about health testing, won't provide any proof of results, or do no testing at all because their breed '*doesn't have any health issues*' - be very wary!

4. Speak to your veterinarian

They spend years studying disease and will be able to help answer some of your questions, and help explain the importance of health screening in reducing the risks of disease.