When can I Breed my Dog or Bitch for the First Time?

Many new breeders are unsure of when they can first consider their dog or bitch for breeding.

Dogs Victoria's rules and regulations set a certain standard for breeders, designed to promote responsible breeding activities and to protect the welfare of the animals involved.

You need to make yourself familiar with the requirements to ensure that any litters you breed will qualify for registration.

Step 1 - Calendar Age

Breeding Females

Most young bitches will have their first oestrus (also called 'season' or 'heat' cycle) around 8-10 months of age. Of course, this varies with the size of the dog – with smaller and toy breeds reaching puberty earlier (around 6-8 months of age) and giant breeds taking much longer (anywhere up to 2 years of age).

Although it is possible for a bitch to fall pregnant and whelp a litter at her first season, her reproductive tract may not yet be fully developed, and there may not have been time to assess her disease and health status fully. For this reason, there are rules relating to '***adequate maturity'*** to encourage responsible breeding.

> ***Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.1.12 states:***
>
> *A member shall not breed with a bitch unless they have reached adequate maturity for that breed as determined by Dogs Victoria, without the prior approval of Dogs Victoria. Where the Rules, Regulations and Codes of Practice are otherwise silent, the minimum age for breeding a bitch shall be 12 months.*

There is a breed listing in the Dogs Victoria Regulations with accepted minimum breeding ages declared for many breeds. It is published regularly in the Dogs Victoria Gazette, and it can be found in the Breeding section of the Dogs Victoria Regulations.

Breeding Males

There are currently no rules regarding the minimum age for a Stud Dog in most breeds – the exceptions being a minimum of 18 months for German Shepherd Dogs and 12 months for Bullmastiffs.

However, if your breed has specific health testing or screening requirements (for example scoring for Hip and Elbow Dysplasia), these tests need to be completed before the male is made available at stud or allowed to mate a bitch.

This means that for many breeds, a male cannot be eligible for stud work until he is at least 12 months of age, simply by virtue of the testing requirements.

> ***Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.3.2.3 states:***
>
> *Where a hereditary disease is recognised by the breed club and Dogs Victoria, or Dogs Victoria, to be a problem in a breed, and where there is a suitable screening procedure or test for that disease:-*
>
> *The owner of a stud dog should, before making the dog available for stud duty -*
>
> - *have a current official evaluation or test result for the dog for such hereditary disease:*
> - *provide the official evaluation or test result to owners of bitches to be mated;*

Step 2 - Health Testing Requirements

Having an awareness of the potential health issues that affect your breed is vital if you plan on breeding. Nobody wants to produce puppies with health issues that could have been prevented.

Remember that as a breeder, you are responsible (both morally and legally) for every puppy you breed.

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Dogs Victoria Regulations 20.3 states:

- *Members will take responsible action to reduce the incidence of hereditary diseases in their breeds.*
- *Where there is a control program, approved by Dogs Victoria, covering a breed for a disease known or considered to be inherited, then breeders within the breed should participate and comply with the requirements of the program.*

All potential breeding animals should undergo testing for any known breed health issues before being included in any breeding program. This testing needs to be conducted in accordance with accepted protocols, utilising reputable testing laboratories.

In Victoria, there is a MANDATORY State Government ***Code of Practice for the Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease***, which is legally enforceable, and outlines acceptable breeding practices for breeds affected by –

- Von Willebrand's Disease (VWD)
- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinosis (NCL)
- Collie Eye Anomaly (CEA/CH)
- Hereditary Cataract (HC)

If you have a breed that is affected by one or more of these diseases, then you **MUST** test your breeding stock, and you **MUST** follow the guidelines regarding acceptable breeding combinations.

You can access an up to date copy of this Code of Practice by visiting the Animal Welfare Victoria website.

If you are not sure about which health tests are required (or suggested) for your breed, your Breed Club will often be the best source of information.

Many Breed Clubs set higher testing standards for their members than the minimums expected under the Rules and Regulations.

Timing of Health Testing

DNA Testing

Disease screening tests that utilise DNA technology can be carried out at any age, provided that the animal can be individually identified with a microchip. DNA testing results do not change with age.

Screening Tests

Some screening tests require the animal to reach a certain age or level of physical maturity before being assessed.

A good example of this is the radiographic (X-ray) scoring for Hip and Elbow Dysplasia, which requires the animal's skeleton to reach a certain maturity level.

In Australia, Hip and Elbow Scoring for an official result can only be undertaken once the individual has reached a minimum of 12 months of age. In some countries such as the USA, official scoring cannot occur until the animal is at least two years of age.

The x-ray assessment for an official hip or elbow 'score' has to be performed by a specialist veterinary radiologist. A regular veterinarian can take the x-ray and can give an opinion on the conformation of the hips but they cannot provide an offical grade or score.

Some screening tests only need to occur once (e.g. hip 'scoring'); others require yearly assessment and certification by a specialist veterinarian (e.g. heart tests, or eye clearances). Before you breed your dog or bitch for the first time, you need to make sure their certification is current.

Mandatory Testing for registration of litters of certain breeds

Some breeds have mandatory health testing requirements, called ***Litter Registration Limitations,*** under the Dogs Australia rules.

A list of breeds with Litter Registration Limitations can be found in the Dogs Australia Regulations Part 6-Section 8.

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Litter Registration Limitations currently apply to the folowing breeds:

Bedlington Terrier	Australian Shepherd
Flat-Coated Retriever	German Shepherd Dog
Golden Retriever	Bullmastiff
Labrador Retriever	Rottweiler
Australian Shepherd	Dobermann

Step 3 - Veterinary Certification

All breeding animals should undergo a thorough veterinary health examination as part of their breeding suitability and health assessment.

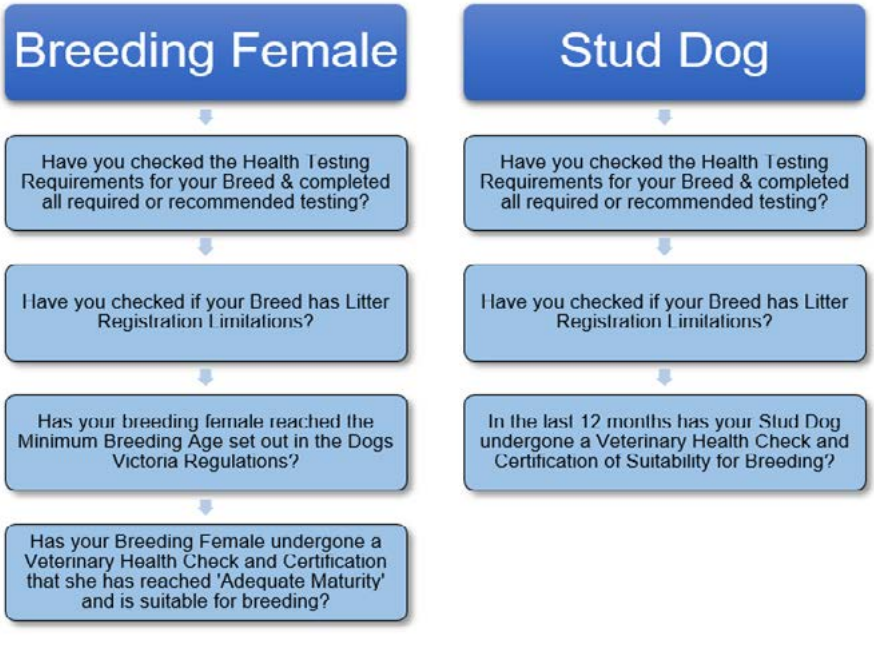
It is part of the Dogs Victoria's Code of Practice requirements for Breeding Animal Health Management that your breeding animals undergo a veterinary health check ***at least once each year.***

Any animals considered for potential breeding should be fit, well, and healthy. They should be at the correct body condition score (not too fat or too thin), and they should be receiving all the required preventative health care and nutrition needed to ensure they are at their prime when it comes to the actual mating and pregnancy.

If this is your female's first litter, you will need your veterinarian to certify that your bitch has reached adequate maturity for breeding and that she has no apparent defects or pathology that would preclude her from breeding.

> ***Dogs Victoria Regulation 20.8***
>
> *20.8.1 All breeding dogs must have a general health check by a veterinary practitioner at least once per year, or more frequently as directed by a veterinary practitioner.*
>
> *20.8.2 All dogs must have a general health check by a veterinary practitioner prior to their first mating. Proof of the health check may be a Veterinary practitioner's certificate, stating that at the time of examination, the dog had no impediments to breeding. This may be undertaken in conjunction with the health check in 20.8.1.*

Dogs Victoria has template documents for your dog's 'Annual Health Check', and 'Clearance to Commence Breeding' to assist with meeting these requirements, or your veterinarian may prefer to use their own their own certificates.



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Dogs Victoria Fact Sheet
Breeders and Breeding

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DOGS VICTORIA
YOUR CANINE COMMUNITY

Minimum Breeding Age for Bitches

Minimum age at which a bitch can be mated (amended 15/08/2024)

12 Months
All other breeds (15/08/24), (15/06/24), (15/01/24), (15/12/18)

15 Months
Welsh Corgi (Cardigan)
Welsh Corgi (Pembroke)

16 Months
Border Terrier
French Bulldog

18 Months
Akita Inu
Alaskan Malamute
American Staffordshire Terrier
Australian Kelpie
Australian Terrier
Basset Hound
Beagle
Bearded Collie (15/02/19)
Bedlington Terrier - applies to bitches born after 01.01.2000
Border Collie
Borzoi
Boston Terrier
Boxer
Bullmastiff - applies to bitches born after 01.06.2011
Cane Corso
Chow Chow
Curly Coated Retriever
Dalmatian
Deerhound
Dobermann
Dogue De Bordeaux
English Setter (15/02/19)
Finnish Lapphund
Flat Coated Retriever - applies to bitches born after 01.01.2002
German Shepherd Dog (16/10/05)
German Shorthaired Pointer
Golden Retriever - applies to bitches born on or after 01.01.2002
Gordon Setter (15/06/24)
Griffon Bruxellois
Hungarian Vizsla
Irish Setter (15/12/23)
Keeshond
Labrador Retriever (01/01/20), (30/06/16)
Miniature Pinscher
Pekingese
Pharaoh Hound
Rhodesian Ridgeback
Samoyed
Schipperke
Schnauzer (Miniature)
Scottish Terrier
Shih Tzu
Staffordshire Bull Terrier
Weimaraner
Weimaraner [Longhair]

20 Months
Bernese Mountain Dog
Mastiff
Schnauzer (Giant)

22 Months
Anatolian Shepherd Dog
Leonberger
Neapolitan Mastiff
Newfoundland
Pyrenean Mastiff
Rottweiler - applies to bitches born after 01.01.1997
Spanish Mastiff
Tibetan Mastiff

24 Months
Afghan Hound (15/01/24)
Australian Shepherd
Azawakh
Cocker Spaniel [American]
Great Dane
Irish Wolfhound
Lhasa Apso
Old English Sheepdog
Pyrenean Mountain Dog
Russian Black Terrier
Saluki
Schnauzer

Minimum Breeding Age for Male Dogs

Bullmastiff – refer to Dogs Australia Regulations Part 6, Section 8.14.4 and 8.14.5 (effective 1/7/26)
German Shepherd Dog – refer Dogs Australia Regulations Part 6, Section 8.8.1 (effective 16/10/05)

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