

# BRIEFING PAPER

# DOG HEALTH



**THE KENNEL CLUB**  
*Making a difference for dogs*

[www.thekennelclub.org.uk/kccampaigns](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/kccampaigns)

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The Kennel Club is committed to ensuring that all dogs have the opportunity to lead healthy, happy lives, with responsible owners and works with the veterinary profession, other dog welfare organisations, breed experts, academics and scientists in order to achieve this.

## THE FOCUS OF OUR ACTIONS TO DATE HAS BEEN TO

1. Improve breeding practices
2. Create resources to help breeders produce puppies free from inherited diseases
3. Research the causes of dog diseases
4. Ensure that dog showing is a positive force for change
5. Educate the general public on health and welfare issues

## 1. IMPROVING BREEDING PRACTICES

Current breeding legislation is poorly enforced and, as a result, there are many high volume breeders, often referred to as “Puppy Farmers” who continue to breed puppies with little regard to their health and welfare or that of the animals in their care.

The Kennel Club established its Assured Breeder Scheme in 2004 to bring responsible breeders together and put in place standards to ensure the health and welfare of puppies being bred. The Kennel Club has been accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) to certify breeders under its Assured Breeder Scheme, making breeders on this scheme the only breeders in the UK to have UKAS accredited certification.

The standards of the Assured Breeder Scheme include:

- Following Kennel Club policy regarding minimum age and number/frequency of litters which include not producing more than 4 litters in a lifetime
- Socialising puppies
- Making use of health screening schemes relevant to all breeding stock. These schemes include DNA testing, hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and inherited eye conditions

- Being inspected prior to receiving accreditation and thereafter, at least once every three years
- Ensuring that puppies are inspected by a veterinary surgeon both before and after sale
- The Assured Breeder Scheme is governed through the Kennel Club's Dog Health Group and specifically through its ABS sub-group – a committee which oversees the setting of policy, rules and regulations for the scheme.

This group is comprised of representatives from both inside and outside the Kennel Club and brings together a wide spread of expertise to ensure that the scheme remains impartial and robust, and is focused on making continuous improvements in breeding practices.

For breeders who are not part of the Assured Breeder Scheme, but wish to register puppies with the Kennel Club, several measures have been put in place to encourage better breeding. These include:

- Requiring a copy of a local authority breeding licence for anyone breeding five or more litters in a year
- Limiting the number of litters of puppies registered from any one bitch to four instead of the legal limit of six
- Refusing to register any puppies born to any bitch which has had two caesarean sections
- Not registering puppies produced from a mating between father and daughter, mother and son, or brother and sister.

## 2. CREATING RESOURCES TO HELP BREEDERS PRODUCE PUPPIES FREE FROM INHERITED DISEASES

The Kennel Club (KC) and the British Veterinary Association (BVA) currently operate health schemes for hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, inherited eye diseases and Chiari Malformation/Syringomyelia. The schemes provide scientifically based expert opinion on these inherited conditions, helping conscientious breeders identify breeding stock that are clinically free of such diseases.

Mate Select, the Kennel Club's free online health resource, was launched in 2011 and has been developed in conjunction with the Animal Health Trust. Mate Select enables breeders to easily and accurately investigate the health of a potential sire or dam that they are thinking of using and integrate health screening and genetic diversity information into their breeding plans.

Mate Select's Health Test Results Finder allows users to find any available health test results of any dog on the Kennel Club's breed register. These results include tests carried out under the BVA/KC health schemes, as well as DNA tests carried out as part of official Kennel Club DNA testing schemes. In addition to this resource, our Inbreeding Co-efficient calculators use all pedigree records stored on the Kennel Club's database to help breeders

select the most genetically diverse mates within the breed for their dogs, thus avoiding high degrees of inbreeding.

Our newly developed Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs), launched in 2014, use BVA/KC hip and elbow screening data and match it to Kennel Club pedigree information, to determine the genetic risk for each dog passing these diseases to their offspring.

### 3. RESEARCHING CAUSES OF DOG DISEASES

The Kennel Club continues to invest in vital research that will help us to understand more about dog diseases, how they are inherited and to develop tests that will enable breeders to breed away from these conditions.

The Kennel Club encourages breeders to make use of relevant DNA tests, many of which have been developed as a result of committed research, at the Kennel Club Genetics Centre and Cancer Centre at the Animal Health Trust. This maximises the chances of their dogs producing healthy puppies. In 2009 the Kennel Club committed £1.2 million to developing DNA testing schemes and so far 8 tests have been developed that serve 23 breeds. Another £1.6 million has been committed by the Kennel Club to the work of the centre for the next five years. The Kennel Club has made significant investment in projects to improve breed health, such as:

- £2.7 million to develop DNA testing schemes at the Kennel Club Genetics Centre
- £28,000 to a University of Liverpool project to investigate and identify genes in Newfoundlands linked to cruciate disease
- £5,000 to the Miniature Dachshund Breed Council to assist in its DNA screening process into Lafora disease
- £100,000 grant to the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies for its Epidemiological Study into Canine Health
- £1.5 million interest-free loan to the Animal Health Trust for the Kennel Club Cancer Centre.

In 2014, the Kennel Club launched a new initiative to improve the way in which information on canine research is shared between researchers, vets and dog owners. The Bio-Acquisition Research Collaboration (BARC) is an online research exchange, bringing researchers and veterinary clinicians together, allowing researchers to post requests on to the BARC webpage for non-invasive biological samples, such as blood samples, tissue biopsies or cheek swabs for DNA.

### 4. ENSURING THAT DOG SHOWING IS A POSITIVE FORCE FOR CHANGE

The structure and look of a dog can sometimes cause health problems if certain physical features are exaggerated through breeding. Examples could include skin infections because

of large skin folds or problems breathing due to overly short muzzles. The Kennel Club reviewed every one of its Breed Standards, which describe the look and temperament of an ideal dog, in 2009 in conjunction with the veterinary profession, to make it clear that exaggerations that caused health problems were not acceptable and should not be rewarded in the show ring. Any wording that could be interpreted as encouraging exaggerations was removed. In addition, the Kennel Club introduced veterinary checks for each of its 'High Profile Breeds', now known as 'Category Three Breeds', in 2012: those identified as being the most at risk from exaggeration related health issues. In recent years the Kennel Club has:

- Carried out veterinary health checks on each of the Category Three Breeds at all Kennel Club licensed General and Group Championship shows
- Organised training seminars and courses for breeders and judges to ensure that only best practice is encouraged at shows and amongst show breeders
- Introduced Breed Watch, which is an online system which allows judges and breeders to view and report any emerging points of concern in their breeds, related to exaggerated conformation, so that steps can be taken to address problems as soon as they arise
- Held regular Category Three Breeds Education days for breeders, show judges and show veterinary surgeons, and Breed Watch seminars.

## 5. EDUCATING THE GENERAL PUBLIC AND BREEDERS ON HEALTH AND WELFARE ISSUES

The Kennel Club holds an annual Puppy Awareness Week, gaining widespread publicity for the need to buy a puppy from a responsible breeder or rescue home. Kennel Club research from 2013 showed that as many as one in three puppy buyers may have unknowingly bought from a puppy farm, after sourcing their puppy online, on social media, in pet shops or through free newspaper ads – outlets often used by puppy farmers.

The Kennel Club annually updates and adds to a large number of different educational information guides on all aspects of responsible dog ownership, from choosing a puppy to looking after a dog in old age. These are available to download from the Kennel Club website and paper copies are available to veterinary practices.

For many years, the Kennel Club has run an annual Breeder Symposium held at the Royal Veterinary College. The Kennel Club and Royal Canin have expanded this concept to include 12 days of seminars throughout each year, held at six of the major veterinary colleges and universities. These events cover health issues, breeding practices and scientific developments which help breeders.

The Kennel Club has launched the first online scientific journal dedicated to dog (and related species) health, Canine Genetics and Epidemiology, as a free resource for the whole dog health community. The journal carries reports on newly emerging genetic research, and carries lay summaries to make it more accessible to the general public and dog breeders, as well as the veterinary community.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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