



Inherited Diseases

What are they?

Dogs can suffer from a large number of diseases and many of these can be inherited. Pedigree dog breeding and showing rules means that dogs of different breeds have been bred separately for many years. As a result, different breeds of dog not only look different but they show different likelihoods of developing particular diseases. Research has shown that every breed of dog that is well studied is prone to a range of diseases.

What sorts of diseases?

Some inherited diseases are very rare or cause only minor suffering, but there are many inherited conditions that are extremely painful or life threatening.

Some examples of inherited diseases that show particularly high levels in certain breeds are:

- cancer
- blindness
- diabetes
- heart disease
- skin complaints
- epilepsy
- hip dysplasia
- deafness

Why do the differences occur?

There are several reasons for the increased risks in particular breeds:

- some is natural variation between breeds
- some is due to people breeding for appearance at the expense of good health

But problems can be made worse by breeding animals that are known to have or to carry diseases, or by breeding closely related animals.

Which breeds suffer from which diseases?

Unlike for people, there are no central medical records for dogs. So we don't have exact figures for the number of dogs of different breeds suffering from every disease.

There's no single site that can tell you every disease prone to each breed, but several websites may help:

- www.upei.ca/cidd
- www.sydney.edu.au/vetscience/lida/
- www.vet.cam.ac.uk/idid

But beware when using these lists, some new or rare breeds may seem healthier, as they have fewer diseases listed, but there may be some diseases which are still undiscovered.

Cross breed dogs generally live longer than pure breeds. Many diseases are rarer in cross breeds, but they do still occur. You need to take care to select healthy parents and puppies whether considering a pure or a cross-breed.

Can inherited diseases be tested for?

Some diseases can be passed from parent to puppy even though the parent does not appear ill. In this case, the parent is called a carrier. Scientists and dog breeding clubs are continually developing tests to identify dogs which are likely to carry disease and should not be bred from.

The most well known screening tests are for hip dysplasia and eye conditions, but recently many genetic tests have also been developed. But, as yet, tests are only available for some disorders and in certain breeds, and it is not compulsory for people breeding dogs to carry out the tests or to use the results when deciding which dogs to breed.

Many breeders are very responsible and do everything they can to avoid breeding dogs which have or carry an inherited disease.

What can I do?

Avoiding buying a puppy that has been inbred.

Inbreeding can produce puppies that die younger, are less resistant to disease and have a higher chance of inheriting diseases. If the puppy you are considering buying has a pedigree certificate, check it for matings between close relatives. You should avoid buying puppies that result from a mating between brother and sister, father and daughter, mother and son, grandparent and grandchild or half brother or sisters.

If you have concerns ask the breeder and seek further advice from your vet.

Many breeders are very responsible and do everything they can to avoid breeding dogs which have or carry an inherited disease.

By only buying a puppy from one of these breeders you will encourage healthier happier dogs in the future.

Checking health screening

Research the inherited diseases which are recorded in any breed you are considering – use the websites listed above and talk to other owners. Seriously consider the possible impact of any likely diseases on a dog's life.

Find out which of the diseases can be screened for in a puppy's parents. Useful websites that may help are:

- www.aht.org.uk/cms-display/genetics_tests.html
- www.thekennelclub.org.uk/health/breeding-for-health/dna-screening-schemes-and-results/

- www.bva.co.uk/Canine-Health-Schemes/

Ask to see the parents' certificates for any disorders which can be screened for before agreeing to buy a puppy. Be sure the dogs were not only tested, but were considered suitable to breed – you may need to seek help from your vet when interpreting the test results. For those diseases which cannot currently be screened for – ask the breeder about their efforts to avoid the diseases. Many breeders will welcome you calling the owners of closely related dogs to see if they have experienced any health problems.