

Heart Testing Statement.

The main role of the Breed Health Co-ordinator is to facilitate, over time, the communication and collection of data on the health of their chosen breed.

Whippets are generally considered to be one of the healthier breeds of pedigree dogs. However, heart disease is documented within the breed and is becoming an increased talking point amongst breeders.

In order for the Kennel Club to make any recommendations regarding health, a sufficient amount of meaningful data needs to be collated and submitted. They can then carefully consider the contents and whether any recommendations are necessary. My focus as BHC for the foreseeable future will be ensuring that we are in the position to submit a bank of heart testing data for consideration.

For several years, there have been testing sessions run alongside breed club shows. The test is called auscultation. This is a good initial screening test that doesn't take long to perform and is usually well accepted by the dog. The cardiologist listens to the heart using a stethoscope as most dogs that have a heart problem will have an audible heart murmur. If a murmur (an abnormal sound) is detected it will be graded by the cardiologist on a scale of 1-6. With 1 being barely audible and 6 being so loud it may even be able to be heard without a stethoscope. It is recommended the dog is at least 12 months old prior to testing, as puppy murmurs can not be considered significant for the purpose of data collection.

The cardiologist will then issue a certificate stating that they could either detect no murmur (0/6) or a certificate grading the detected murmur (1/6 – 6/6).

It is important to understand that auscultation testing is not a diagnosis. Whilst the majority of dogs that have a heart problem will have a detectable murmur, by far from all dogs with a murmur will have a heart problem. Many murmurs are found to be 'innocent', meaning no heart abnormality is found to account for the abnormal heart sound.

The cardiologist performing the auscultation testing will be able to discuss with you the best course of action should a murmur be detected. It is not uncommon for a Whippet with a low grade murmur to test clear if the test is repeated at a later date, perhaps with lower stress levels or in a different environment. So this is something to consider before more extensive testing.

If a more severe murmur is detected, or if a dog with a low grade murmur is hoping to be used in a breeding programme, diagnostic testing will be recommended. This is performed by Doppler Echocardiography (heart scanning). Ultrasound waves are used to examine the heart and identify any abnormalities in it's structure, function or blood flow.

The two top causes of heart disease in adult dogs are Mitral Valve Disease (MVD) and Cardiomyopathy. Both these diseases have been reported in Whippets.

What can you do?

As Breed Health Co-ordinator I am asking all breeders to seriously consider auscultation testing on their dogs prior to being bred from. If performed at a group testing session the cost is usually £30 and under. Going to a cardiologist privately will cost around £60. This is very affordable.

This will enable any dog with a serious congenital defect, that could be passed on, to be removed from any breeding programme.

We need to build up a picture of heart health as Whippets age. So I am asking for those people who have already tested their dogs, to have re-tests performed every few years.

An absolute ideal would be to test every year, which is being indicated on the certificates issued by most of the cardiologists that have been involved in testing our breed. Particular consideration should be given for males that are being used regularly at stud and for females before each litter and then again as a veteran.

Cardiologist Mike Holgate is collating our data and has asked that we particularly focus on retests and the testing of older dogs.

Key points

- Test your own dogs prior to breeding
- Have retests done throughout the dogs life
- Test your veterans
- If you own a stud dog, encourage the owner of the bitch to have her tested before you agree to mating
- Send your results to Mike Holgate (in strictest confidence) so they can be used in the breed research

Heart certificates can only be issued by an approved veterinary cardiologist.

List of those approved to issue certificates for auscultation.

<http://www.bsavaportal.com/vcs/Information/Heart-Testing/auscultation>

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