



Pedigree dogs have many inherited diseases and different breeds each have their own problems. Many dog breed societies employ testing schemes to detect individuals affected with certain conditions at any early stage of the disease at an early age. Early detection is important, not only to ensure appropriate treatment for affected dogs but also so that these animals can be excluded from breeding programmes to prevent them passing on the disease to their offspring. Congenital heart diseases are not uncommon in puppies and some of these are inherited. There are a number of breed testing schemes which allow early detection of these conditions.

The following breed clubs operate heart testing schemes:

- Boxer - aortic stenosis
- Bull terrier - aortic stenosis and mitral dysplasia
- Cavalier King Charles spaniel - mitral valve disease
- Great Dane - dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)
- Irish Wolfhound - dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)
- Newfoundlands - aortic stenosis
- Pyrenean sheepdog - patent ductus arteriosus (PDA)
- Field Spaniel - prevalence of murmur and arrhythmia

### How do I get my dog tested?

Heart testing for the breed schemes can only be carried out by certain specialist veterinary cardiologists. A list of all currently eligible vets (and their contact details) can be found on the Veterinary Cardiovascular Society website <http://www.bsava.org.uk/vcs/>. An appointment can be made with a specialist veterinary surgeon in your area at their practice or, in some cases, the specialist may come to your vet's practice. Additionally many of the breed clubs arrange for specialists to be available at certain major dog shows - you should contact the individual breed societies for information on this.

### Why do the breed clubs run these schemes?

There are a number of advantages to the breed club of running these schemes:

- a. The clubs can identify unaffected (or less severely affected) animals which can then be used for breeding.
- b. The number of affected dogs in the breed can be calculated so that clubs can monitor whether the disease is becoming more or less common and whether the breeding programmes are working.
- c. To identify affected animals so that owners and vets caring for these animals can be advised on treatment.

### What tests are included in the screening?

The exact format of the investigation will depend on the individual breed scheme. The three standard tests used for investigation of heart disease are

#### 1. Listening to the heart with a stethoscope (auscultation)

Using a stethoscope the vet can identify any heart murmurs and abnormal heart rhythms which may indicate a structural defect in the heart. In many cases detection of an abnormality with a stethoscope will indicate that further investigation is required.

#### 2. Performing an ECG

An ECG allows monitoring of the heart rhythm and rate. Some breeds of dog, notably boxers and dobermanns, develop heart conditions that specifically affect their heart rhythm. Sometimes your vet will be able to perform an ECG in the surgery but for many conditions it is necessary to fix a mobile device to the dog which is worn for 24 hours or longer - the device is then removed and the information sent away for analysis.

#### 3. Ultrasound of the heart

## Canine heart testing schemes



Specialist veterinary cardiologists can use ultrasound to examine the heart in detail. This can be done in most dogs without any form of sedation or anaesthesia and in some breeds it can be done without clipping the hair. With ultrasound the vet can examine the chambers and valves of the heart to detect any abnormalities in heart development or function.

### **What will happen to my dog if the screening test shows a problem?**

The screening tests are very sensitive in picking up early changes in the heart. It is quite possible that the vet doing the test will detect an abnormality that will not affect your dog in everyday life (however it still might mean that your dog cannot be used for breeding). The vet who does the screening will provide a report to your usual vet and any further investigation or treatment will be managed through your own veterinary surgeon. In some cases your vet will want to refer your pet to a specialist veterinary cardiologist for further investigations.

When animals are screened through a breed heart testing scheme the results of the tests will also be sent back to the breed society for them to use in monitoring the health of the breed. This information will always be kept confidential.

For more information, visit:

[http://www.fieldspanielsociety.co.uk/health\\_schemes.htm](http://www.fieldspanielsociety.co.uk/health_schemes.htm)

**If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact your local Veterinary Surgeon.**