

THE HEALTH STATUS OF THE PUG BREED

2018

How are Pugs doing health-wise? The answer depends a lot on who you ask. The parent club, breeders, exhibitors and Pug lovers in the USA have made slow, but steady progress in our desire to improve the health and longevity of our breed.

Our first research efforts, with Dr. Kimberly Greer at the helm, resulted in a DNA test to determine if a dog carried one, two or no alleles for Pug Dog Encephalitis. We continue to encourage research on this deadly disease and would like to find a test with even greater precision in determining a dog's susceptibility and also find more successful treatment protocols.

A preliminary project by Dr. Amber Labelle greatly increased what is known about a problem affecting the eyes of our Pugs called Pigmentary Keratopathy. We are hoping for future research to help determine treatments and to discover the heritability of this issue which causes pigment to form on the corneas, resulting in reduced vision of varying degrees.

Our breed has a form of rear limb weakness, and often incontinence, which is similar in some respects to Degenerative Myelopathy. Dr. Kathleen Smiler and Dr. Jon Patterson, along with the team at Michigan State University, have been hard at work for several years on Pug Myelopathy, its multiple causes and presentations, with plans to try to determine which causes are the most important and what the role of genetics is in the disease.

It was 8 years ago that the Pug Dog Club of America became a part of the Canine Health Information Center and set up recommended health testing that should be done on all potential breeding and show stock. Our 4 core (required) tests reflect the major health issues that we can test for and that we know our breed has. They are Pug Dog Encephalitis, an eye exam, hip dysplasia and patellar luxation. We have 3 other recommended, but not required, tests which are elbow dysplasia, Pyruvate Kinase Deficiency and serum bile acids. To date, 223 dogs have completed the required tests and made them publicly available which has qualified them for a CHIC number. That works out to about 28 dogs per year.

Considering the popularity of the breed, and an unknown but perceived large number of litters produced every year, one would wish to see more interest in participation in this program.

That said, there are many dedicated Pug people who see the value of testing and also support health research through participation in our fund-raising activities and with donations to our health fund. So in answer to the question- how are Pugs doing health-wise- the people who are dedicated to, and closest to the breed, would probably say "not too bad, and continually improving."

Unfortunately, our breed, along with other brachycephalic breeds like Bulldogs and Frenchies, is coming under fire around the globe. As a person who has been devoted to the Pug breed since 1980, has been a veterinarian since 1985 and has owned, bred and loved dozens of Pugs and treated many more in practice, I must take issue with some of the criticisms that are being espoused. A colleague went to a national lecture on surgery and the audience was told to hope for plenty of brachycephalics in their practice because you could repair nostrils, eyes and palates on ALL of them. A video of a veterinary surgeon discussing the elongated soft palate of a Pug put forth that 95% of the dogs she sees need the surgery. I would argue that to date, only 1 dog that I have produced has had palate surgery. We also had a highly respected surgeon address our membership several years ago and he indicated that he didn't feel palate problems were the top issue in Pugs and that it was more likely the non-surgical condition, laryngeal collapse. I know of an owner of a Pug who had a boarded surgeon recommend and do palate surgery on her dog and she is far worse post-op than she was before surgery. My Pugs are happy and healthy as are the majority of dogs I see at shows and in my practice. I would certainly not deny that there are dogs that have respiratory issues, but to imply it is almost the entire breed population is not true. We are closely following the research team at Michigan headed by Dr. Bryden Stanley who has an interest in the actual issues seen in the brachycephalics, is involved in cutting edge research on the problems and will provide us with more practical knowledge about our dogs based on science rather than blanket condemnation. The vets in the UK and Australia will not publish photos of brachycephalics in their journals. Folks in the UK will not allow their pictures in greeting cards. It is not realistic to think that we will all start breeding to beagles or some other breed to change the structure of our dogs. We have Pugs for a

reason. We try to breed quality, healthy, happy and hearty dogs that conform to our standard. They make ideal companions, can compete in conformation, obedience, rally, agility and tracking, can provide comfort and pleasure as therapy dogs and make the world a better place.

We are not going away.

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