

Information for Breeders and Puppy Buyers: Health Clearances for Vizslas

In general, Vizslas are a healthy breed, but as in all breeds (as well as mixed breeds), hereditary health problems can sometimes occur. Careful breeders do their “homework” ahead of time to have the best odds of producing sound, healthy pups.

Be sure the parents of the pups have certificates from OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) verifying normal hips - responsible Vizsla breeders get OFA certificates on dogs before using them in a breeding program, as required by the Code of Ethics shared by the Vizsla Club of America and the Twin Cities Vizsla Club. [http://vcaweb.org/about/code_of_ethics.shtml]. OFA numbers on grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. are also important in a breeding program.

Hip Certification

The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (www.offa.org) provides databases for hip ratings, and this information is of incalculable value to breeders and buyers. Research on Vizslas in the 1950s and 1960s played a key role in pointing to the role of genetics in hip dysplasia, and additional research in other breeds has confirmed the importance of heredity in this disease. Many current breeders can remember the struggle to establish the importance of requiring sound hips for breeding. Since those early days, the incidence of hip dysplasia has been greatly reduced as responsible breeders have x-rayed their dogs, submitted the x-rays to OFA for grading, and bred only those dogs that were certified as having normal hips (graded as fair, good or excellent under OFA’s rating system). Meanwhile, research continues and other tests are becoming available. An example is the PennHip test, which can measure joint laxity at a younger age than the two years needed for OFA certification; however, PennHip does not have an open database for looking up a dog’s results. At this time the VCA/TCVC Code of Ethics does not recognize PennHip as a substitute for OFA certification; however, owners can provide PennHip data to OFA to be recorded in the database.

CHIC Tests

Tests for other hereditary health concerns have become available over the years. When you visit the OFA website, you will see something called CHIC. This is the Canine Health Information Center, a centralized canine health database jointly sponsored by the AKC/Canine Health Foundation (AKC/CHF) and OFA. Each participating parent club can specify the tests required for a dog to get a CHIC certification number. The Vizsla Club of America has specified tests for hips, thyroid and eyes; when a dog’s test results for these three areas of concern are submitted to OFA, the dog is given a CHIC number. It should be noted that a CHIC number by itself only verifies that the dog has been tested; it does not necessarily mean the dog has “passed” all the tests. Breeders and buyers still need to look at each test result to verify the health clearances.

Additional Tests

In addition to the three tests required for a CHIC number, many breeders also choose include one or more of several optional tests: congenital cardiac abnormalities, elbow dysplasia, sebaceous adenitis and von Willebrand’s disease.

Other Health Concerns

For some health concerns there are no tests available yet. Knowledgeable Vizsla breeders will be aware that epilepsy and allergies can be a concern. These are not common problems in

Vizslas, but good breeders “do their homework” and ask questions in the careful process of selecting dogs for breeding.

The history of the Vizsla breed in North America has included many dedicated breeders and owners who have been deeply committed to improving the health of the breed. The Twin Cities Vizsla Club encourages breeders and puppy buyers to continue this legacy.

Here are some excellent resources for additional information:

<http://www.akcchf.org/> (Home page of the AKC Canine Health Foundation)

<http://www.offa.org/breedtests.html?btnSearch=Tests+by+Breed> (On the OFA website, information listed by breed for health tests)

<http://www.vcaweb.org/welfare/health.shtml> (Health page of the Vizsla Club of America website)