



Proposed Health Checks for KUSA Belgian Shepherd Dogs in Southern Africa



Belgian Shepherd Dogs are one of the few larger breeds that have up to now had very few health issues. They have always been considered a healthy breed and may be attributed to their popularity (or lack thereof) in the past. When reviewing the health statistics of the breed for common issues such as hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, heart conditions and so forth, it is noticed that in general, there have been very few recorded cases of problems in these areas. When compared to similar Shepherd breeds, these health issues have been almost non-existent.

Looking at breeds such as the German Shepherd Dog it may be argued that the Belgian Shepherd has fewer of these problems because of their smaller size in comparison. While this may be true to a degree, it should be borne in mind that there are several smaller breeds such as Pugs, Cocker Spaniels and Dachshunds that have a significant number of health issues from a statistical perspective and that size is therefore not the single factor for health concerns. Health concerns such as hip dysplasia is genetic and is often passed on to progeny of affected parent(s). Unless parents are found or known to carry the genes that result in such problems, the fault is passed on from generation to generation and eventually results in an unhealthy breed that may never recover from such faults. It is known from modern research that environment and diet are also contributing factors to health problems such as hip dysplasia, however, these can be easily controlled and or rectified when compared to genetic faults.

Contributing to the spread of these faults is the diversity of bloodlines, the popularity of the breed and breeding of suitable pairs to reduce the risk of the transmission of these faults. Unfortunately, some of these faults have no testing currently available and or are only detected when the dog nears maturity. The fact of the matter is that unless tests are carried out for these health issues, the risk of spreading the fault significantly increases among the breed.

The Belgian Shepherd Dog is certainly not free of genetic health faults; however, the number of these faults are few. That being said, during the last ten to fifteen years, the Belgian Shepherd Dog has grown in popularity. This growth has increased exponentially, to the point that we see the German Shepherd Dog being replaced in many areas of life such as military applications, law enforcement and dog sport by the Belgian Shepherd Dog. As a result of this demand, the supply of Belgian Shepherd Dogs for these purposes has become financially very viable and there is thus an explosion in the number of Belgian Shepherd Dog breeders globally.

Unfortunately, this also means that breeding is no longer for the improvement of the breed and neither is the selection of prospective mating pairs properly and or carefully selected which will undoubtedly result in less healthier dogs being produced, dogs with unstable temperaments and many of the problems that have previously been seen in the more popular breeds of days gone by.

Although not as significant as similar breeds, there is a steady increase in the number of health and temperament issues coming forth in the Belgian Shepherd Dog, particularly the more popular varieties and the time to start acting in an effort to reduce the occurrences of these issues is now.

The Belgian Shepherd Dog Clubs affiliated to KUSA have been investigating and watching the health and temperament changes in the Belgian Shepherd Dog over a period, both in Southern Africa, the United States of America and Europe. After consultation and discussion with members, breeders and other interested parties, it was agreed that South Africa needs to be proactive in addressing some of these concerns by putting certain health checks in place.

The remainder of this document addresses the proposed health checks that should be put in place for Belgian Shepherd Dogs in Southern Africa, specifically those used or intended to be used for breeding

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and whom are registered or expected to be registered as breeding stock with the Kennel Union of Southern Africa. These tests are classified under mandatory and voluntary health checks.

Mandatory Health Checks

The proposed mandatory health check requirements are typically the same tests that are already in place for several other breeds registered with KUSA and aims to ensure that only healthy dogs are used in breeding programmes under KUSA affixes. By doing so, it contributes and significantly increases the objective of improving the quality and health of Belgian Shepherd Dogs in Southern Africa and also provides prospective buyers of KUSA registered puppies with a basic assurance of purchasing a healthy Belgian Shepherd Dog from KUSA registered breeders.

The following are proposed as mandatory requirements and health checks for Belgian Shepherd Dogs intended for breeding purposes:

1. The proposed Dam and Sire must be positively identified by microchip prior to an X-ray examination.
2. The microchip identification number is included on all developed X-ray film and or digital images.
3. Belgian Shepherd Dogs presented for X-rays, for the purpose of grading hips and elbows, must be a minimum of eighteen (18) months of age or older at the time of being presented.
4. The microchip identification number must be included on any grading certificate issued.
5. At the time of mating, the Sire must be at least eighteen (18) months of age.
6. At the time of whelping, the Dam must be twenty-two (22) months of age or older.
7. Breeders must be members of KUSA in good standing, preferably with a KUSA-registered Affix (Kennel Name).

Hip and Elbow Gradings

Belgian Shepherd Dogs that have differing left and right hip gradings, must use the lesser (poorer) of the two gradings as the overall hip grading i.e. a dog with a hip grading of A1/B1 will be graded as B1 for breeding purposes.

Belgian Shepherd Dogs with hip gradings of A1 through B1 may be mated with each other.

Dogs with hip gradings of B2 through C2 may only be mated with a dog that has a grading of A1 through B1.

Belgian Shepherd Dogs with hip gradings less than C2 may not be used for breeding. The following table summarises hip grading breeding combinations.

Hip Grading	Hip Grading of Prospective Mate					
A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
A2	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
B1	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
B2	A1	A2	B1	-	-	-
C1	A1	A2	B1	-	-	-
C2	A1	A2	B1	-	-	-
D1	Not fit for breeding					
D2	Not fit for breeding					
E1	Not fit for breeding					

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Hip Grading	Hip Grading of Prospective Mate
E2	Not fit for breeding

Only Belgian Shepherds with an Elbow grading of ED(2/2) or better may be used for breeding.

Belgian Shepherd Dogs that have differing left and right elbow gradings, must use the lesser (poorer) of the two gradings as the overall elbow grading i.e. a dog with an elbow grading of ED(1/2) will be graded as ED(2/2) for breeding purposes.

Voluntary Health Checks

The Belgian Shepherd Dog is a relatively healthy breed; however, certain varieties and bloodlines are prone to specific health issues and it is thus recommended that dogs are voluntarily tested for the more common of these issues. The recommended voluntary health tests are:

- a. Ataxia
- b. Progressive Rod-Cone Degeneration (PRA-prcd)
- c. Epilepsy