

EYE SCHEME

What is the Eye Scheme?

The BVA/KC/ISDS Eye Scheme offers breeders the possibility of eye testing to screen for inherited eye disease in certain breeds for certain known conditions. By screening for these diseases, breeders can eliminate or reduce the incidence of eye disease being passed on to the puppies. Not all breeds have inherited eye disease and, for reassurance, any breeder can have their dogs eyes examined under the Scheme, even if the breed is not mentioned in the Eye Scheme literature.

BVA produces the Scheme's procedure notes which set out the rules and regulations by which the Scheme operates and all the information needed to use the service. This includes those breeds and conditions in which there are known or suspected inherited eye disease as well as the set charges and the list of BVA appointed eye panellists who conduct the eye testing.

In general, the best age for eye testing is before a dog has reached one year old and thereafter on an annual basis. However, in some breeds, it is necessary to test them as young puppies (usually between six and twelve weeks of age) and so details of litter screening are also included.

What conditions and breeds are specified?

The eye scheme currently relates to conditions involving the eye itself and not those involving the tear ducts, the eyelids or other surrounding structures. Therefore hereditary eye conditions of the lens, retina and other internal structures are listed, whilst eyelid conditions such as entropion, ectropion and distichiasis are not. These latter conditions are of importance, but because of their extremely complex nature and the paucity of scientific evidence relating to their degree of heredity, they are not included in the Scheme at present.

The breeds listed are those where specific hereditary eye conditions are known or suspected. The breeds and conditions are then divided into two different categories (Schedule A and Schedule B) for different purposes.

What are Schedules A and B?

Schedule A lists the known inherited eye diseases in the breeds where there is enough scientific information to show that the condition is inherited in that breed and often what the mode of inheritance is. For the breeds in Schedule A a certificate is issued with results of "affected" or "unaffected" and these results are recorded and published by the KC. Schedule B lists those breeds in which the conditions are, at this stage, only suspected of being hereditary and therefore are "under investigation".

The reason for having the Schedule B list (under investigation) is to alert breeders to a potential problem and to encourage them to have their dogs eyes examined regularly under the Scheme. As a result, as much information can be collated and analysed as quickly as possible. In this way, an emerging condition can be detected early and dealt with properly before it becomes more widespread. It would be wrong to put breeds and conditions on Schedule A without proper evidence, as they might be "condemned" wrongly of having an inherited problem. Some suspected problems do not turn out to be hereditary at all.

Who decides when a breed or condition is added to Schedules 1 or 3?

BVA appoints an Eye Panel Working Party (EPWP) which is made up of experienced veterinary ophthalmologists. They meet at least twice a year and make the final decisions on what breeds and conditions will be included in the Scheme. Amendments to the procedure notes come into effect twice a year on 1 January and 1 July so that it is important to check each year whether new breeds or conditions have been added. The KC and BVA notify breeds clubs, breeders and veterinary surgeons respectively of the changes as appropriate.

How does a breed or condition qualify for inclusion in the Scheme?

There are a variety of ways in which information on eye conditions is provided to allow the EPWP to evaluate the quantity and quality of findings. For inclusion of conditions in Schedule B (under investigation) there may have been a few cases seen under the Scheme and presented by breeders who wanted their dogs eyes examined, even though they were not listed in the Schedules. Sometimes cases are seen in the veterinary surgery and often a breed club will have gathered information on pedigrees or problems in related dogs in the UK and in other countries. However the information becomes available, if there is enough concern that there may be an emerging inherited eye condition, it is placed on Schedule B.

Schedule A conditions (certifiable) need scientific evidence of the condition in a breed and so the criteria for inclusion have to be much stricter. The amount and reliability of information is important and often there will need to be recognised published data available either in this country or abroad. Because Schedule B alerts breeders to potential emerging conditions, these breeds are encouraged to be seen regularly under the Scheme and in large numbers if possible. This information is automatically relayed to BVA via the certificates issued and it is collated and analysed so that reliable data can be gained quickly and effectively. Sometimes breeds and/or conditions are moved from Schedule B to Schedule A as a consequence of the information gathered by BVA.

How do I get my dog's eyes tested?

There is a list of BVA appointed eye panellists who can issue certificates under the Scheme and you can make an appointment with them directly or through your own veterinary surgeon. Often breed clubs will arrange for a BVA panellist to attend their organised dog shows. This allows many dogs to be examined on one occasion and may save time and money. You must have your relevant KC registration documents with you at the time of testing to qualify for an eye test under the Scheme. If your dog is permanently identified (by microchip or tattoo) the veterinary surgeon will wish to check and certify the number on any certificate issued. Wherever possible, you should also provide any previous eye certificates issued for your dog.

What should I do if I want to breed from my dog?

It will be necessary to get the latest information on the conditions relevant for your breed. Make sure that the dog and bitch to be mated have current eye certificates showing them to be unaffected. As most conditions have to be certified each year, certificates should not usually be more than one year old. The Kennel Club publish all results of Schedule A breeds and will be able to tell you over the telephone of any dog's current result, providing you know that dog's KC Registered Name and/or Number.

Can I do any more to help the breed?

Yes. Not only should you have your dog tested annually for the relevant Schedule A and Schedule B conditions but you could ask your breed club if they are doing anything else for the breed. The KC work closely with breed clubs and often a geneticist or eye panellist with a particular interest in that breed or condition may be helping a breed club privately. Obviously, wherever possible, you should not breed from a dog that is affected or has any suspected inherited eye disease.

Where can I get more information?

The Scheme's procedure notes and other free leaflets can be obtained from:
BVA, 7 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NQ Telephone (020) 7636 6541

Library information and current eye test results for KC registered dogs can be obtained from:
The Kennel Club, 1-5 Clarges Street, London W1Y 8AB Telephone 0870 606 6750