

# The Kennel Club is developing a tool to reduce breathing problems in dogs

For some dog and cat breeds, breeding has, for a long time, pursued a very short muzzle and skull. A too short muzzle endangers normal operation of the respiratory and thermoregulatory system and increases the risk of serious health problems. The Finnish Kennel Club takes this matter seriously and is cooperating with the University of Helsinki to launch a project which aims to reduce and eliminate breathing problems in various breeds.

Breathing difficulties have been taken into account in the Kennel Club's general breeding strategy. As a concrete measure, the Finnish Kennel Club is cooperating with the University of Helsinki and the Bulldog Club in development of a fitness test for reducing and eliminating breathing problems in brachycephalic (short-nosed) breeds. Fitness testing includes, for example, a walking test where oxygen intake and movements of the dog are measured. In addition, skeletal and skin disorders can also be examined. The intention is that only dogs that pass the test will be used for breeding.

A pilot study with Bulldogs is at the moment going on. The Pug Club has also contributed to the development of the test. The Finnish Pug respiratory study involved 20 dogs. The researchers' final conclusion was that "loudness of the breathing sounds separated the bad from the good breathers. The study also provided a strong indication that the walking test can be used to separate good breathers from bad, if the individual does not have other factors which hinder walking. "

The measurements of the dogs involved in the study are scheduled for completion later this year. The final form of the test should be ready in the beginning of next year. When ready, the fitness test will be offered to all clubs representing brachycephalic breeds. The French and Boston Terriers' breed organization, the Finnish Toy Dog Association, considers it important to promote health in the breeds it represents. The Toy Dog Association supports all voluntary measures. According to the association, a properly designed fitness test can be a good instrument for the breeders. The association points out that educating the breeders and puppy buyers with appropriate and timely information plays a key role in promoting the health of the dogs.

## Exaggerated features in dog shows

The Breed Specific Instructions program has been used in Sweden for many years, providing guidelines to dog judges about exaggerated features of appearance (conformation); this system is now in use in Finland, too. These standards are applied particularly to 39 high-risk breeds and the identification of breathing difficulties is addressed in detail. The guidelines explain exactly what aspects of conformation

should not get rewarded or how the symptoms will need to be taken into account relative to the dog's result for the competition. For each show, judges write down their findings for how many affected dogs were judged and which exaggerated features were seen. Accumulation of information is done by the kennel club to monitor the situation in various breeds.

In a late summer show (2015) a Swedish judge rewarded top honours to a dog that had obvious difficulty in breathing. The video has toured in social media, and the issue has created a stir, especially when the judge, on a TV program, denied ever having met any dogs suffering from breathing difficulties.

Hundreds of Swedish veterinarians have now signed an open letter to the Swedish Kennel Club and the Ministry of Agriculture, highlighting concerns about the predisposition to respiratory difficulties in brachycephalic and snub-nosed breeds. Swedish Veterinarians suggest that these breeds of dogs should have compulsory examination by a veterinarian prior to breeding and use; in addition, there should be an examination of puppies before they are released to a new owner. In the UK, veterinary surgeons and the British Veterinary Association (BVA) has announced the share the concerns of their Swedish colleagues for the problems in brachycephalic dogs.

[More on this subject in November and December Koiramme journals.](#)

[Additional information short-nosed breeds / brachycephalic syndrome](#)

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[Finnish Pug respiratory research](#)

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