



## **Dog Breeds: Meet the Belgian Shepherds – Update Your Knowledge!**

March 8, 2022

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Staying up to date with common, let alone rare, health risks in susceptible dog breeds can be difficult. In this regular feature, our Educational Partner, the [International Partnership for Dogs \(IPFD\)](#), signposts resources on a particular breed and highlights breed-specific diseases

### **Meet the Belgian Shepherds – Update Your Knowledge!**

IPFD has published [“Get a GRIHP! on Belgian Shepherds”](#) as an in depth examination of health and well-being of these breeds. “In the US (AKC) the Belgian varieties are registered as separate breeds. Today in the EU countries it is important to acknowledge that the four Belgian shepherd dog varieties are interbred. In 2013 the FCI [Fédération Cynologique Internationale] encouraged inter-variety breeding in co-operation with the country of origin, Belgium, which opened registration of inter-variety crosses in 2019.”<sup>1</sup> The actions for interbreeding are to be welcomed as an attempt to preserve the genetic diversity of the varieties<sup>2</sup>.

Belgians are relatively healthy: however, health strategies from various countries recommend or require screening to keep watch on conditions of interest (see figure below). All varieties of Belgian shepherds are true working dogs, used by police and military, and preserving their robust, effective health and temperament is important. Dog show populations, however, are primarily bred based on coat phenotypes.

There are several genetic tests available for specific conditions, none of which are widespread but potentially important in specific lines. See the GRIHP<sup>1</sup> for more information and for extensive type-specific reports.





Note that “Some Belgians have the dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) mutation found in the Dobermann breed, but that mutation doesn’t seem to cause a clinical disease in Belgians.”

These dogs (any variety) are not a good fit for homes that cannot offer them a lot of engagement on a regular basis. In show lines there may be more sensitivity; working lines might be very strong-minded and need strict rules and proper training. When getting a Belgian shepherd, more important than the variety is the specific family line.”<sup>1</sup> Veterinarians should advise clients and prospective owners – especially in the face of **a new movie that may increase their popularity.**<sup>3</sup>



<b>Conditions of Interest – Belgian Shepherds.</b> Information from Health Strategy Providers including kennel and breed clubs. R1 = Mandatory for registration of offspring; R2 = Recommended; R3 = Acknowledged									
Health	Belgium	Finland	Sweden	Norway	UK	US	Holland	Germany	France
Hip dysplasia-HD	R1/R2	R1	R1	R1	R2	R2	R2	R1	R2
Elbow dysplasia-ED	R1/R3	R1	R1	R1	R2	R2	R2	R1	R3
Spine/Back (spond.,	R1/R3	R2	R3	R3			R3	R2	
Shoulders (OCD)	R3	R3						R3	
Heart		R3				R2			
Eyes		R1	R2	R2	R2	R2			
Thyroid		R3				R2			
Ataxia	R1/R3	R2	R3	R3			R3	R1	
CJM/DM	R3	R3	R3				R3	R2	
Epilepsy	R1/R3								

			
<b>Groenendael</b>	<b>Laekenois</b>	<b>Malinois</b>	<b>Terveuren</b>

More resources to help you:

1. [Get a GRIHP on Belgian Shepherds](#) from IPFD on DogWellNet.com.
2. Lampi, S., Donner, J., Anderson, H. et al. Variation in breeding practices and geographic isolation drive subpopulation differentiation, contributing to the loss of genetic diversity within dog breed lineages. *Canine Genet Epidemiol* 7, 5 (2020). <https://cgejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40575-020-00085-9>
3. [Why Dog Experts Worry About Channing Tatum's New Movie With a Belgian Malinois](#) .

*The International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD) is a non-profit working for dog health, well-being, and welfare. This article has been prepared by its Veterinary Science Officer, Dr Brenda Bonnett, DVM PhD.*

