



ABOUT ▾

MEMBERS ▾

COMMITTEES ▾

GUIDELINES ▾

ACADEMY

CONGRESS ▾

NEWS ▾

ACCOUNT ▾

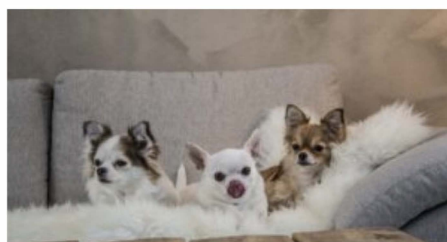
Meet the Chihuahua – Update Your Knowledge!

🕒 November 13, 2023 🔖 Scientific



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 Meet the Chihuahua – Update Your Knowledge!





Meet the Chihuahua – Update Your Knowledge!

IPFD has published [“Get a GRIHP! on the Chihuahuas”](#) as an in-depth examination of health and well-being of this breed.

Smallest dog breed in the world

The Chihuahua is the smallest dog breed in the world. Native to Mexico, the breed became popular in the late 19th century. Today, many celebrities own Chihuahuas and have increased the breed's visibility and demand - not always a good thing.

Trauma and accidents common causes of death

Chihuahuas can live to 13 years or older, but there are a few common factors and conditions that reduce the overall lifespan of the breed.

The most common causes of death in insured Swedish Chihuahuas were skin trauma, hit by car/train/vehicle, symptom of heart failure, epilepsy and neurological (unspecified). For skin trauma, Chihuahuas have > 5.5 times the risk of all breeds, and for heart failure and neurological, 3-4 times the risk (Agria insurance statistics 2011-2016).¹

According to Finnish statistics, 6.8% of Chihuahuas die from accidents at an average age of 5 years and 10 months.²

Many of the breed's health problems are due to its extreme conformation and small size. The most important conditions are:

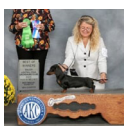
- **Dental:** periodontitis, missing teeth, malocclusion;
- **Neurological:** Chiari-like malformation and syringomyelia³; hydrocephalus; epilepsy; canine epileptoid cramping syndrome (CECS);
- **Immune-mediated brain infections:** granulomatous meningoencephalitis (GME); necrotizing meningoencephalitis (NME); meningitis (meninges infection);
- **Orthopaedic:** patella luxation and Legg-Perthes disease;
- **Cranial:** abnormal jaw length and width, open fontanel⁴⁻⁵, cleft palate, cleft lip, bulging eyes;
- **Dystocia;**
- **Ocular:** cataracts, PRA, distichiasis, caruncular trichiasis;
- **Cardiac:** patent ductus arteriosus, mitral valve disease; and
- **Hypoglycaemia.**

Instructions on the conformation of breeding dogs



The Nordic Kennel Union has developed Breed Specific Instructions⁶ to influence the breeding of sounder and healthier pedigree dogs. In the Chihuahua, the following risk areas are listed:

- **Mouth:** Problems like underdeveloped muzzle giving rise to faulty bite, dentition and jaws. Also canine teeth running up into the roof of





gums.

- Paralyzed tongue.
- Eyes: Protruding and set in shallow eye sockets which increase risk of eye injuries.
- Hindquarters: Weedy and unsound in construction.
- Open fontanel is now a disqualifying fault from having been a characteristic feature.
- Particular attention must be paid to the formation of the skull and the jaws and the general anatomy.

Similar instructions in the UK list the following concerns: Incorrect dentition, wry jaw, retained puppy teeth, misplaced teeth, protruding tongue because of incorrect teeth, missing teeth, incorrect bites, excessively short muzzles⁷.

Advice for Chihuahua owners and those considering a Chihuahua

As very small dogs, Chihuahuas are prone to accidents - often fatal. The breed is not recommended for families with small children.

Despite their small size, or perhaps because of it, Chihuahuas are also strong-willed and have a big-dog attitude. As such, they need proper handling and training.

Beware of merle Chihuahuas - merle means spotted or mottled coat pattern - as they can have varying degrees of sight and hearing loss. Merle is not a recognised colour for the breed. Mating two merle dogs is very risky and should be avoided.

Many of the breed's health problems are due to its extreme conformation and extremely small size. It is essential that the puppy is purchased from a responsible breeder.

See the table for health tests and breeding recommendations in different countries

Considerations in Breeding

R1- Mandatory for registration
R2- Recommended
R3- Recognized

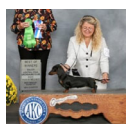
| Condition/testing | UK | US | Finland | Sweden | Norway | NL | Germany | France |
|--------------------|----|----|---------|--------|--------|----|---------|--------|
| Hypertypia | R2 | | R2 | R2 | R2 | R2 | R2 | R2 |
| Dentation | R2 | | R2 | R2 | R2 | R2 | R1 | R2 |
| Fontanel | | | R2 | | | R2 | R1 | |
| Natural whelping | | | | R1* | R2 | | | |
| Weight (min. 2 kg) | | | | | | | R1 | |
| Neurological | R3 | | R2 | | | R3 | | |
| Patella luxation | R2 | R1 | | R1 | R1 | R2 | R1 | R2 |
| Eye disease | R2 | R1 | | R2 | | R2 | | R2 |
| Heart disease | | | | | | | | |
| Temperament | | | R3 | | | | | R2 |
| Age min. 18 months | | | | R1 | | | | |

*Against the law to breed from a bitch that has had two Caesarean sections.

Health strategies from various countries recommend or require screening of breeding dogs and considering certain characteristics in breeding.

References

1. [Get a GRIHP on the Chihuahua](#)
2. [Finnish Kennel Club cause of death statistics on Chihuahua](#)
3. Kiviranta et al. 2017. Syringomyelia and Craniocervical Junction Abnormalities in Chihuahuas. *J. Vet. Intern. Med.* 31(6): 1771-1781.
4. Kiviranta et al. 2021. Persistent fontanelles in Chihuahuas. Part I. Distribution and clinical relevance. *J Vet Intern Med*, doi: 10.1111/jvim.16151.
5. Kiviranta et al. 2021. Persistent fontanelles in Chihuahuas. Part II: Association with



craniocervical junction abnormalities, syringomyelia, and ventricular volume. J Vet Intern Med, doi: 10.1111/jvim.16123.

6. [The Nordic Kennel Union Breed Specific Instructions](#)

7. [The Kennel Club UK: Judging dog shows - Breed Watch – Chihuahua](#)

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 Business and Project Coordinator, Katariina Mäki, PhD (Anim Sc)



Share [f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [p](#)

♥ 2

Related posts



September 17, 2023
Coming soon: NEW WSAVA
Global Guidelines on Small
Companion Animal Direct
Zoonoses

[Read more](#)



September 17, 2023
Meet the Beagle – Update
Your Knowledge!

[Read more](#)



July 25, 2023
Meet the English Setter –
Update Your Knowledge!

[Read more](#)

[Subscribe to WSAVA News, Events and Upcoming Activities](#)



Pages

[► Home](#)

Quick Links

[► Member Benefits](#)

World Congress

[World Congress Lisbon 2023](#)