

UPDATE FROM:
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A Plain Man's Guide to the New DNA Test for LAD

LAD stands for Lethal Acrodermatitis, a hereditary disease which is unique to Bull Terriers and Miniature BTs. Everyone in these breeds is familiar with it so I will deal only briefly with its characteristics. It is inherited as a double recessive, so puppies suffering from it result from crossing two carriers. Both parents appear to be entirely normal, the affected puppies are typically significantly smaller than their siblings and are very prone to skin infections. They fail to thrive, they are unable to metabolise zinc and supplementation with zinc doesn't help; breeders have generally referred to them as "zincys". Breeders are dismayed when such puppies appear in litters from healthy parents. My own last litter, born in January 2007, was of five well marked bitches. Two went to breeders and both produced LAD puppies, it can happen to anyone! Now a test is available what should we do to prevent further LAD puppies?

To avoid getting LAD puppies we need to check that both intended parents are not carriers of the LAD gene. So we need to get them both DNA tested. If both are clear of the gene we can go ahead with the mating. If one is clear but the other is a carrier we can still go ahead with the mating as no LAD puppies will be produced. Some breeders may think that breeding from carriers should be banned, but our gene pool is already too small and we cannot afford to throw away good healthy specimens which are carriers. Of course, if both intended parents are carriers we will need to choose a different sire which is clear. Evidently, breeders can only make sensible breeding decisions i.e. ones which will not result in LAD puppies if the LAD status of all potential parents is known. That is why the Kennel Club should be asked to adopt an official scheme and publish all of the results. A simple solution, if everyone cooperates we can say goodbye to this pernicious disease.

There is a clear parallel between LAD and Primary Lens Luxation (PLL) in MBTs. The "Mini" breeders have shown the way with PLL, I hope and expect BT breeders to be as successful in tackling LAD.