



Health Statement for the Irish Terrier Club of America (ITCA)

Written by Dr. Ian MacDonald, Health and Research July 5, 2017

Irish Terriers are a healthy breed with a life expectancy of 12-14 years.

There are only two hereditary diseases known to affect Irish Terriers, Hyperkeratosis and Cystinuria. Both are due to genetic recessive mutations so phenotypically normal carriers can produce affected offspring.

Hyperkeratosis is a thickening and hardening of the footpads, which can result in painful calluses and cracking. This disease is easily identified and is now rarely seen in North American Irish Terriers. A DNA test has been developed for the disease, so in the rare instance where a problem is suspected, carriers can be positively identified to eliminate the risk of producing affected puppies.

Cystinuria is an increase in cystine concentrations in the urine due to failure of reabsorption in the kidney. This can lead to the formation of stones which can block the flow of urine, a potentially fatal condition unless treated surgically. In Irish Terriers, cystinuria appears to be testosterone dependent so only mature intact males are affected and the disease is not often seen. This makes identification of carriers difficult but the club is supporting gene sequencing studies and a DNA test is expected in the near future. If affected dogs are treated and neutered, they are expected to lead normal lives.

Irish Terriers rarely suffer from other complaints such as the hip, heart and eye problems often reported in other breeds. Although diseases such as cancers can occur, especially in old age, they do not appear to be hereditary.

Until a DNA test is developed for cystinuria, no screening tests are recommended for Irish terriers but breeders should check pedigrees for past problems when breeding. If a breeding is suspect, male puppies can be monitored for increased urine cystine levels as they mature and neutered if necessary.

This Health Statement approved by The Irish Terrier Club of America Board of Directors