

Brucellosis: what it means to Boxer Breeders.

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I went through a frightening experience, when screening a bitch for canine Brucellosis. This article details what I learned, and, I hope, will save other breeders from my terror.

Brucellosis is a disease, caused by a bacterium, *Brucella Abortus*, and it is found in many mammals, including man. In man it causes relapsing, or undulant fever, and may be controlled by antibiotics. In cattle it causes abortions, and male sterility, and is not practicably curable. In dogs it causes abortions and/or foetal resorption and male sterility.

Infection is by venereal means, by contact with products of conception, or by secretions. It is a serious public health hazard, since cure is uncertain, and affected animals, although without symptoms, may sporadically shed infectious material. Livestock become sterile and unsuitable for farming. The US Department of Agriculture sponsors immunisation of calves against Brucellosis. No such vaccine is made for dogs (more on this later). **If you do find a dog to be infected with Brucellosis, your choice is simple; you must cease operations and sacrifice your dogs.** You have a public health hazard, and, remember, Brucellosis is incurable ... to try to keep, or cure, your dogs is irresponsible and it is not ethical. Even pet owners, with a single dog, bear this burden.

Therefore, most reputable stud dog owners have six-monthly checks on their males, and, require recent negative tests on bitches which come to be bred. Very reasonable, you may say, and I agree. But, it's not quite that simple ... here is my story.

I had a young bitch to be bred. Eighteen months earlier she tested negative (as did the stud dog) on a screen test for Brucellosis. After whelping, and raising, normal puppies she came in season and was to be bred. The test result read:-

"Brucella screen, canine. This is a final report. **Positive** at 1:50. Very low titers may indicate early infection, antibody response blunted by the use of antibiotics or false positive reaction due to related antigens. Highly recommend either re-testing in three weeks or confirmatory testing by AGID".

My reponse was one of incredulity, and dismay .. I was supposed to ship her the next day

On calling the stud dog's owner, I was told that false positives were common with this test. What to do? I decided on the AGID test (more specific analysis); the laboratory (200 miles away) had enough serum to ship to Cornell University, so we told them to go ahead and send it.

.The next four days were bad, dreading and awaiting results, including a false lab. message which reiterated the screening outcome. Finally we heard:-

"The Brucellosis AGID (cytoplasmic protein antigen) was **negative.**"

"The microscopic agglutination test (m stain) was **negative.**"

What a relief. I can't tell you how that weekend was ... absolute horror. The thought of having my lovely Boxers killed nearly did me in. The shipping and breeding went well and the bitch had a fine, healthy litter.

Thinking of that vaccine? The bad news is that, were it even available, it would cause dogs to show positive Brucellosis test results.

I strongly suggest that breeders follow the course of some veterinarians and have the AGID (agar gel immunodiffusion) test done initially. The cost of the screening, circ. \$20:00, as opposed to that of the AGID test, circ. \$40:00, is more than offset by the chance of needing both, due to the frequent false positives found with brucellosis screening alone.

Also, I plead for openness. After I publicised my grief, others confided their own miseries to me. I'd no idea of such things, until it happened to me. Even the mention of possible Brucellosis infection is enough to wreck a breeding operation, and how fast rumours can travel the globe. Professional jealousies are still alive, and flourishing. Perhaps this article will be a help to other Boxer people, if only to warn them of these false positives.

One last note. In the April 1997 issue of the AKC Gazette is a submission, by Margaret Pough of Cornell University. Their institution recommends brucellosis testing of bitches before oestrus .. a good plan, when you can anticipate the season. Their Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory is well known as an AAVLD reference facility, and has recognised a significant increase in positive, canine AGID tests in 1996. A disturbing trend is an increase in the number of dogs that tested negative on the slide screening test, but were AGID positive. This could occur when dogs had been treated with antibiotics, which usually cause the slide test to become negative, while the dogs are still truly infected. Disturbing indeed. Some questionable practices seem to be in use.