

A Brucellosis Concern

By Katie Winters (As published in the Pinscher Patter, March 2004)

We know it must be done, but we all hate the added expense and bother of testing bitches and studs prior to breeding. There is the added work of coordinating the timing of the bitch's season with the availability of the stud dog, making arrangements with the stud owner, shipping the bitch, etc. Breeding is a major undertaking and a scary one, I might add. I learned the hard way through personal experience the value of testing prior to breeding.

In my case, the bitch was a Min Pin, Ch. TerLee's Full of Flash (Ch. Roadshows's Steppin on the Edge X Ch. Marlex Electra Maddness) an extremely well bred, Group winning bitch. In her third trimester (52 days) of pregnancy, April 6, 1997, "Monkey" aborted her litter. The litter was a repeat breeding of her litter six months earlier which produced two live puppies. I had tested her for brucellosis for the first litter, but not for the second. After she aborted this second litter (actually one tiny puppy was alive - two were dead), the slide screening we did for brucellosis came back positive. The same blood was then sent to Cornell for their AGID test, which also came back positive. I was told, "A positive on this test is considered truly positive." Both Cornell and my vet said she had brucellosis. AGID positive dogs are considered infected and should not be bred. A positive dog must be spayed or neutered and kept on antibiotics for five or six years all the while being regularly retested for brucellosis. Canine brucellosis has the potential for infecting humans, particularly those that are immune compromised. The Monterey County Health Dept. went so far as to inform me that I could be held liable if any person came down with brucellosis as a result of contact with my dog. All this time "Monkey" was shedding copious amounts of pus while my vet was treating her with specific human antibiotics for brucellosis. I had to thoroughly disinfect every bit of my property inside and out daily where the dogs lived and ran. At the same time I was attempting to keep "Monkey" in isolation and all of her body fluids away from the other dogs. At one point to my horror, her urine leaked out from under a pen she was in and one of the other dogs licked it. I felt certain this other Min Pin would become infected (she didn't).

At this same time a blood culture was done which later came back negative, but by that time the bitch had been euthanized. I should have waited for the result of the culture before acting so hastily, but because of the advice of vets, the fear of losing all my other dogs and knowing "Monkey" would have to be spayed, kept on antibiotics and retested numerous times, I put her down.

Because of the extensive testing the stud dog owner and I had done on all other dogs in our kennels (all dogs including the stud dog testing clear for three consecutive months) and also plain common sense, make the occurrence of brucellosis a real mystery to me. Brucellosis is a highly contagious disease, yet no other dog came up positive. Neither the stud owner nor I live around pigs or cows which can carry brucellosis. Other kennels infected with brucellosis have ended up euthanizing most if not all of their dogs. Between her first and second litters this bitch went to no shows and was hardly off my property in California (which is completely fenced) other than routine trips to the vet. The only time she was away was when I accompanied her to the stud for breeding in Oklahoma. As of 2003, I have had twelve healthy litters here, done much testing for brucellosis, and the stud dog owner has done the same. We have had no reproductive problems or infertile dogs.

If I had done the initial slide screening for brucellosis prior to taking "Monkey" for breeding all of this expense, anxiety, pain and suffering and loss of the bitch might have been prevented. If the first slide screening was positive, I could have dealt with this problem more easily and with far less expense and toil for all concerned. The issue would have been isolated to my kennel and I could have faced the dilemma in a more direct and perhaps, better thought out way. If the slide screening had been negative, I would have approached the crisis in a far more well informed and completely different manner. I would have suspected "Monkey" did not have brucellosis, asked more questions, and never have put her down. As it now stands I'm left wondering if the AGID test was correct or mistaken.

In closing, Dr. Robert Van Hutchinson, Canine Reproductive Specialist says, "Brucellosis is a very serious disease that all bitches should be tested for every time they are going to be bred, and males should be tested for every six months if they only breed a negative female.

Brucella bacteria can be passed through all body discharges, not just through breeding, so even individuals that have never been bred but who have been to a show, a kennel, a field trial, need to have a negative brucellosis test.

Brucellosis is not common, but because it is extremely deadly. I myself consulted with a kennel a few years ago who put down 26 dogs because of an infected male they brought in. It is a serious disease which is primarily associated in the bitches with aborting puppies, and in the male causing inflammation of the testicles and subsequent infertility.

It is at this point not curable to the point of returning to reproduction. Do not

wait until the last minute to have your brucella test run because the slide test run by veterinarians in their office, actually made from sheep brucellosis, one dog out of five has a false positive.

Even with AI you can protect the male, but not the female, from a dog who has brucella. Because you put prostatic fluid and ejaculate into the bitch, along with the brucella. When we freeze semen, it is critical to us to be certain the male is negative for brucellosis, so we aren't preserving these bacteria for a thousand years!

Most dogs (with brucellosis) do not have to be put down, but they must be neutered and put on antibiotics for four or five years. And it is transmissible to humans too.

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