

The English Cocker Spaniel Club of America Health & Rescue Organization

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Protecting the current and future generations...

Understanding Health Clearances Recommended For An ECS

If you are looking to add an English Cocker to your family, health clearances of the parents and/or the prospective ECS should be on your list for discussion with the breeder(s) you contact. The ECSCA has one of the oldest Health Committees in the USA for purebred dogs, and has worked hard for our membership and dogs to address health issues in our breed as best we can. We support research that is beneficial to our dogs, conduct surveys to collect data on any concerns, and recommend health screenings relevant to our ECS. Information on those recommendations can be found on our ECSCA Health and Rescue website:

<https://www.ecscahealthandrescue.org/index.php/health-clearances/>

The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals <https://www.ofa.org/> maintains a database of health clearances and contains decades of information. Some of the data is sent directly into OFA, some the owners must submit, but it is a very good resource for health information and the tests that are recommended for each breed. Individual dogs are searchable in their database.

The tests we recommend are:

DNA Tests

There are three DNA tests recommended for both types of ECS (show bred and field bred), and an additional two DNA tests for field bred lines. Using either blood or cheek swabs depending on what the laboratory requires, these tests can be done at any age and need to only be done once.

These are all conditions that are genetically recessive, and in order to have the disease a dog would need to have a defective gene from both parents. Results are usually reported as either "Normal", "Carrier", or "Affected". It is recommended that a breeder would only breed an "Affected" or "Carrier" dog to a "Normal" dog, thus not producing more "Affected" offspring. "Carriers" will not have the condition, but can produce it if bred to another "Carrier" or "Affected" dog. Being a "Carrier" does not affect the health of a dog.

The current recommendation for breeding stock regarding DNA tests is that if both parents are tested "Normal" for a disease, then the offspring are considered "normal by parentage" and do not have to be tested. The next generation should be tested to ensure that no mutations have occurred.

1. **PRA/prcd** – Progressive Rod/Cone Dystrophy – this is an eye disease test recommended for both types of breeding ECS. When this test was first developed, the normal dogs were reported as “A”, carriers were reported as “B”, and affected were reported as “C”. So you may still hear mention of a dog’s parent being “A, B, or C” when it comes to PRA results. Eventually the results were reported as “Normal, Carrier, or Affected”, which you are more likely to hear today when discussing PRA results with a breeder.
2. **FN** – Familial Nephropathy – Kidney disease test, recommended for both types of breeding ECS.
3. **AON** – Adult Onset Neuropathy – A neurological disease, recommended for both types of breeding ECS.
4. **AMS** – Acral Mutilation Syndrome – A neurodegenerative sensory disorder, recommended for field bred type.
5. **EIC** – Exercise Induced Collapse – Recommended for field bred type.

The rest of the recommended tests use either blood tests, physical exams/x-rays or electro-diagnostic tests for which there is no DNA test.

6. **BAER** – Hearing – Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response – Testing at 35 days of age or older. This test the hearing from the ear to the brain stem (not beyond that point) using electro-diagnostic equipment. Small electrodes are inserted under the skin and brainwaves are recorded for each ear. Recommended in parti-colored/roan English Cockers of both types. Test results are either bi-laterally normal, unilaterally deaf (one ear is deaf) or bi-laterally deaf (both ears are deaf).
7. **Eyes** – CAER (Companion Animal Eye Registry) or CERF (Canine Eye Registry Foundation) This is an eye exam done by a member of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO) to look for heritable eye diseases at any age. The eyes are dilated and examined. Test results will be either “Normal”, or will identify any disease/defects found and will either not recommend the dog for breeding “No”, or recommend that it is a “Breeder’s Option”. Breeder Option means that it is up to the breeder to decide if they choose to use the dog for breeding since there is not a potential compromise of vision nor ocular function. Eye exams are recommended for all types of breeding ECS annually, or at least bi-annually.
8. **Autoimmune Thyroiditis** - OFA Thyroid Certification can be done at 12 months and older. Using a few special laboratories in the USA, three tests are run on a blood sample. Results for this test will be reported as “Normal”, “Autoimmune Thyroiditis”, or “Idiopathically Reduced Thyroid Function”. It is recommended that breeding stock of both types be tested until 6 yrs of age.
9. **Hip Dysplasia** – OFA Certification – At 2 years of age, a hip x-ray can be done at a vet’s office and sent into OFA to be evaluated. Results reported as either “Excellent”, “Good”, or “Fair” are considered normal for breeding purposes. Those reported as “Borderline”, “Mild”, “Moderate”, or “Severe” are considered dysplastic and are not recommended for breeding purposes. X-rays done before the age of 2 years are called preliminaries, and are useful if the

dog will be bred before they are old enough to be certified. Dogs only need to be certified once at 2 years or older. This test is recommended for all types of breeding ECS. Less commonly, some breeders may use another evaluation method for grading hips that is called Penn Hip. Information is available online should you want more information on this method.

10. **Patellar Luxation** (knee caps) – OFA Certification – At 12 months or older, a veterinarian can check for patellar luxation. The vet will fill out an OFA form and it is submitted for entry into the database and issuance of an OFA certificate. Results of this test are reported as either “Normal” or as having “bilateral luxation” or “unilateral luxation”. If there is luxation, it will be classified as Grade 1-4 depending on the severity. This one-time test is recommended for all types of breeding ECS.