

PUPPY “HEALTH GUARANTEES” – BEHIND THE FINE PRINT

Many commercial puppy merchants use impressive sounding puppy “Health Guarantees” as a sales gimmick to promote their puppies. READ and ANALYZE these carefully. These “guarantees” are often much less desirable than they appear at first blush.

1. RETURN AND REPLACE: The most commonly offered type of guarantee, this allows you to return your puppy if diagnosed to be suffering from a congenital disorder covered by the guarantee. This is for a limited time period (usually 1 – 3 years) and normally covers things like crippling hip dysplasia. These guarantees also are usually riddled with many caveats (like environmental conditions which nullify the guarantee). This document requires that you must give your puppy back to the seller. Are you prepared to do this, after you have loved and raised your pup for a year or so? If you are, what assurances do you have that your replacement pup won't be from the same breeding or breeding line as the first pup, and the same hereditary problems won't be present in this pup as well? Also, some puppy merchants, when confronted with a buyer willing to return a crippled pup, will attempt to dissuade the owner with threats that they will “take the dog back, but will immediately euthanize it.”

MOST PUPPY SELLERS CAN BE CONFIDENT OFFERING THIS SORT OF GUARANTEE SINCE THEY KNOW VERY FEW BUYERS ARE WILLING TO GIVE THEIR PUPPY BACK! This sort of guarantee represents a very HIGH risk to you as the buyer, and a very low risk to the seller.

2. REPLACE ONLY: This guarantee offers you a new pup, sometimes at no charge, sometimes for ½ price. However, now you have two pups, and are still facing potentially expensive vet costs for the first pup. Also, your second pup, if from the same breeding or breeding lines, is likely to suffer from the same hereditary problems.

3. FULL OR PARTIAL REFUND: This is almost never offered, but some responsible breeders may amend their contract, if you ask. This means if your pup develops a congenital disorder covered by the contract, the breeder may refund you all or part of the purchase price of the pup.

4. “HEALTH CERTIFIED:” All this usually means is that the breeder has given the pups their first set of vaccinations, worming, and probably had the dewclaws removed. This is so basic, only the worst possible “breeders” wouldn't supply this. Micro chipping may also be offered as part of the sales pitch. This is a small device inserted by needle below the skin between the shoulder blades. The device can then be “read” by a scanner. It provides owner information in the event the dog is lost. This costs about \$15-50 and can be performed by any vet.

5. 72 HOUR RETURN POLICY: This allows you as the buyer to return the pup (usually within 48 – 72 hours) if the pup is “sick.” The pup must be seen and diagnosed by a vet. This is standard for all but the very worst breeders. However, if you have purchased your pup over the internet, YOU must pay the shipping costs (usually about \$250 each way).

HEALTH CLEARANCES – WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

Many buyers are confused by Health Guarantees (which are supplied on the puppies being sold) and Health Clearances (which are tests done on the parents and ancestors of the puppy).

Health clearances are documented proof supplied by breeders that the parents and ancestors do not carry genetic or hereditary diseases or disorders which can be passed on to the pups. ALL dogs, especially purebred dogs, carry these genetic disorders. If a breeder tells you their dogs are healthy and have no genetic problems, this is a BIG RED FLAG!! Make them back that up with documentation.

Here are some examples of what a good breeder will provide you:

1. Hip and Elbow Clearances: These are radiographs evaluated by qualified organizations, such as OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals). Most dogs in the pup’s pedigree should have clearances (see www.offa.org for more info). These clearances minimize the risk that your pup will inherit this crippling and debilitating disease. If a breeder tells you their local vet x-rayed the parents and said they “looked good” DON’T BELIEVE IT. There are standardized protocols for making these evaluations. If a puppy seller won’t send in the radiographs for certification, there is usually a reason. Also, dogs cannot receive OFA ratings until they are 2 years old. If the parents are younger than this, they WILL NOT HAVE OFA RATINGS. Some breeders will radiograph hips and elbows at 18 months and can receive a “preliminary” rating at that time.
2. Eye Clearances: This is an annual exam performed by board certified ophthalmologists on parents to verify that they are free from congenital eye disorders, such as Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) and Entropion. The document is provided by CERF (Canine Eye Registry Foundation) and more info can be found on the OFA website listed above.
3. VwD Clearances: vonWillibrands Disease (vWD) is a hereditary blood clotting disorder. Parents are tested and certified as “clear,” “carrier,” or “affected.”
4. Other Clearances: Some breeders also test their dogs for heart defects, thyroid or auto-immune disorders, etc.

Good breeders also usually offer health guarantees on their puppies, but that is backed up by documenting the genetic health of the pup’s ancestors. You must decide what level of risk you are willing to assume when you buy a pup.

REMEMBER, YOU ARE BUYING A PUPPY, NOT A GUARANTEE. THE BEST GUARANTEE OF A HEALTHY PUPPY IS ONE WHOSE PEDIGREE OF ANCESTORS CAN BE PROVEN TO BE HEALTHY AND SOUND THEMSELVES!

