

# German Shepherd Dog Health Issues in Perspective

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Contrary to public perception, the German Shepherd Dog (GSD) is not plagued by Hip Dysplasia (HD).

According to the statistics of the authoritative Orthopaedic Foundation for Animals (OFFA), there are 39 other breeds of dogs with worse Hip Dysplasia than GSD's. Their website can be accessed at <http://www.offa.org>.

Of the other genetic diseases monitored, the GSD ranks 54<sup>th</sup> out of 67 with regard to Patellar Laxation, 54<sup>th</sup> out of 63 with regard to congenital cardiac problems, 43<sup>rd</sup> out of 67 monitored for Thyroid problems and 8<sup>th</sup> out of 101 with regard to Elbow Dysplasia (ED). There are no diseases listed specifically prevalent in GSD's and it is clear that the canine diseases that do affect GSD's also affect other breeds to an even greater extent.

Unfortunately, the OFFA does not provide statistics by country or by organisation, and thus there is no information pertaining to the prevalence of diseases of dogs bred under compulsory minimum rules and monitoring such as those imposed by the German Shepherd Dog Federation of SA (GSDF) or dogs bred without any control whatsoever.

In the GSDF, club Breed Supervisors and tattooists are compelled to report any genetically based diseases they come upon. Breeders are also encouraged to report genetic problems. If it becomes apparent that an animal produces too high an incidence of a debilitating disease, the animal may be disqualified from breeding.

A culture exists in the GSDF whereby breeders will generally replace any dog found to have a disqualifying fault or serious genetic disease, and breeders are thus very careful in planning their breeding so as to avoid genetic problems. It is important to note that the breeder is not compelled to replace such dogs unless priorly agreed to. Significantly the Consumer Protection Act excludes animals, specifically because animal breeding can be expected to produce the occasional problem.

HD has been controlled on a compulsory basis since the inception of the GSDF in 1984. The GSDF was one of the first organisations to introduce compulsory HD monitoring. Only animals that have passed the GSDF's HD scheme are allowed to breed. Nevertheless, the prevalence of HD in the GSDF is considerably less than that expected from the OFFA's statistics. In practice less than 1% of dogs bred in the GSDF develop clinical symptoms of HD during their working lives, i.e. before the age of eight.

Like humans, old dogs develop all sorts of bone and joint problems. When dogs over eight years old develop arthritis or rheumatism, it should not be confused with defects such as Hip Dysplasia: it's simply old age. HD is officially defined as a developmental disease **before the age of two years old**.

The incidence of Elbow Dysplasia (ED) is very low in the GSDF: less than 20 dogs are known to have developed clinical symptoms of the disease over the last 23 years. X-raying is voluntary, but the National Breed Supervisor is compelled to report any dog suspected of the disease for investigation. If the dog is found to have ED, it is immediately banned from breeding. Any dog that has had an operation on the elbow that may have been the result of ED, or that may disguise any ED present, is also banned from breeding.

*Note: The Orthopaedic Foundation for Animals (OF FA) was founded in 1966 with the primary object to collate and disseminate information concerning orthopaedic and genetic diseases of animals, particularly dogs and cats. Its web site can be visited at [www.offa.org](http://www.offa.org).*