

THE CHIC PROGRAM FOR THE GREAT DANE

The Great Dane Club of America (GDCA) joined the Canine Health Information Center (CHIC) program in the fall of 2003. By 2005 there were over 200 Great Danes entered in this Canine Health Foundation program with an increasing number qualifying every quarter. The CHIC program, jointly sponsored by the AKC and the OFA, has four main goals: to work with parent clubs in the definition of health issues for which a central information system should be established, to establish and maintain a central health information system in a form and manner that will support research into canine disease, to provide health information to owners and breeders, to base the availability on individually identified dogs on the consent of the owner, and to establish scientifically valid criteria for the acceptance of information into the database.

As time passes and more tests become available they can be added to what is required to achieve the CHIC. (For example, if a gene test for DCM were to be found, then this could be added in for the breed's protection.) Currently in order for a Great Dane to receive a CHIC number, the dog must have test results on record for:

- Hip Dysplasia - Results accepted from OFA, PennHIP, GDC, or OVC.
- Eyes - Results accepted from CERF.
- Congenital Cardiac Disease - Results accepted from OFA.
- Autoimmune Thyroid Disease - Results accepted from OFA.

For general info on the CHIC program see: <http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/>

Great Dane breed info: <http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/brdreqs.html?breed=GD>

Search CHIC database for individual results: <http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/search.php>

FAQS ABOUT THE CHIC PROGRAM:

Where can I find the forms I need to have filled out?

The needed forms are online at OFA. OFA & CERF at their websites outline in detail how to gather and submit data for various certifications. Most are familiar with how to submit X-rays for hip scores to such as OFA and PennHip. Some of the other tests may be somewhat unfamiliar to some owners and breeders. For eye results, not only does the dog have to be examined by a board-certified ophthalmologist, CERF paperwork that this DVM gives you must then be submitted (with the appropriate fee) to CERF itself. Please note that without this final step the dog will not obtain CERF certification please note. For OFA Cardiac certification, an approved DVM must perform an auscultation (with a stethoscope) on the dog, and an echocardiogram, if done, will be noted on the dog's results at the website & on the CHIC form. That veterinarian's status also will be reflected on the dog's heart certification, i.e. whether the DVM is a generalist, a specialist or a cardiologist. It's recommended that OFA Cardiac certifications are done by either a board certified cardiologist or a veterinarian qualified in internal medicine with training in cardiology. Note please that this exam is for congenital defects of the heart and is NOT a screening examination for DCM (dilated cardiomyopathy). The application is available online.

It seems that there are many more Danes which could become CHIC qualified if only they would complete the OFA thyroid panel. Many Great Danes seem to have thyroid testing, but by non-certified labs or only the routine diagnostic panel (T-4, and/or TSH, etc.) which do not include the TgAA, which is the one which is the most useful in screening young adults for autoimmune thyroiditis. For an OFA Thyroid certification the dog must have blood submitted to an approved lab that performs a TSH, FT4D and TgAA in compliance with the gold standard for this particular test. This test and its procedures are designed to screen specifically for inherited thyroid disease and is not necessarily the same lab procedures employed to "check a dog's thyroid" (function) for example. The forms & instructions can be downloaded from the OFA website. You as the owner need to fill out the top portion, your attending veterinarian examines the dog and draws blood, while attesting to the dog's health, and the serum is sent to the laboratory where it's processed and the results sent to OFA and returned to you vet as well. Be sure to include the paperwork and fees for processing with the blood (serum) sample.

Which labs/veterinarians will OFA accept results from & what do I need to bring with me to the exam??

This list of labs and the tests that must be done by them are also on the form for the test in question. For example for a OFA thyroid the list of approved laboratories are at the OFA website. There are several labs in various parts of the country and the sample is simply sent in the mail from your vet to a nearby lab. (There are even two in Canada.) MSU, Cornell, UC Davis, UMinn and TxA&M provide testing, but you cannot just send it off to your vet's "regular" lab necessarily and have to include the OFA paperwork for such as MSU to provide to OFA the results. Note that OFA and your vet will both get the results back, so you will see them too. For OFA Cardiac certification, an approved DVM must perform an auscultation (with a stethoscope) on the dog, and an echocardiogram, if done, will be noted on the dog's results at the website & on the CHIC form. That veterinarian's status also will be reflected on the dog's heart certification, i.e. whether the DVM is a generalist, a specialist or a cardiologist. It's recommended that OFA Cardiac certifications are done by either a board certified cardiologist or a veterinarian qualified in internal medicine with training in cardiology. Note please that this exam is for congenital defects of the heart and is NOT a screening examination for DCM (dilated cardiomyopathy). The application is available online. CERF approved veterinarians (i.e.

ophthamologists) typically bring the needed paperwork with them, but you will often have to provide the paperwork yourself with some veterinarians when asking for a heart or hip exam, and nearly always when drawing blood for a thyroid exam. So check before showing up for the appointment. Bring also official identification on the dog (AKC registration number, date of birth, etc.) **NOTE PLEASE THAT A DOG MUST HAVE PERMANENT IDENTIFICATION VIA A TATOO OR MICROCHIP TO BE ENROLLED IN THE CHIC PROGRAM.**

What is the minimum age for certification & how often do I have to repeat the exams?

Each test may vary in minimum age, but the details are all available at the OFA website. 12 months is the minimum age allowed typically for all but the hip exam, but a good time to start would be 2-3 years when the dog is a young adult & preferably before s/he is bred. Your local vet can usually do both the hip and thyroid exam at one time and some can likely do a basic heart exam (auscultation). To add in the CERF and a full heart examination by a cardiologist involving an echocardiogram will likely require you see a specialist. Note the basic OFA Cardiac does NOT screen for anything but congenital ("puppy") heart disease, so an echo done routinely (every 1-2 years) on adult Danes (especially males) is recommended to screen for DCM and other adult onset heart disease. And although it's not required to maintain your CHIC status, OFA has suggested, in accordance with expert guidelines, that dogs be checked regularly as an adult for thyroid disease. Annual testing from 2-4 years is ideal. Biennial thyroid testing after that will suffice. CERF is only good for one year & "expired" CERF exams are noted *in italics*, but for many eye conditions that affect Danes (such as eyelid abnormalities), a single exam will likely note any issues. Cataracts are an exception to this general rule and should be followed regularly (i.e. on an annual basis) to see if they are progressing. The CERF veterinarian can advise you on specific needs for reexamination.

What can interfere with testing results?

Illnesses, certain drugs and even the estrous cycle (of bitches) can potentially interfere with thyroid testing. OFA also recommends that hip screens not be done during estrus. This is another reason to simply schedule that first OFA thyroid when you are planning an X-ray for OFA hips. All Danes undergoing thyroid testing should also be in good health, as various illnesses can have an effect on thyroid function. Bitches should be in anestrus ideally. Any medications a dog is taking should be discussed with the vet prior to doing any sort of health screening.

What happens if the results are equivocal? What happens if my dog doesn't "pass"?

Hip scores can come back as "borderline" or with a request to retest which doesn't necessarily imply the dog has hip dysplasia. Thyroid testing can result in an "equivocal" status. This is not a "fail" nor does it mean the dog has thyroid disease; it means the results of the test were inconclusive and should be repeated in 3-6 months. Upon repeat of the thyroid testing, most dogs will then receive a clear "pass" or "fail." Some eye and heart conditions can also be considered a "gray area" where retesting may be recommended. If this occurs the dog will STILL receive its CHIC certification right away. A similar situation results even if your dog "fails" a certain testing, as the CHIC program has been instituted to be an "open" registry and offers a way for owners/breeders to gather information & get feedback on various aspects of their dogs' health --it is not intended as a way to separate dogs into groups of "passes" and "fails." So as long as the owner is willing to reveal non-normal ("fail") results, the dog will still receive his CHIC certification. The CHIC is a reward for seeking health data on individual dogs and then being willing to share it; it is not a program designed to externally define dogs as breedable or not. What the breeder and/or owner decides to do with the extra information provided by the CHIC program will depend on how they perceive the results as impacting on the overall health and breeding status of the dog in question.

Your dog's CHIC status will be noted at the OFA website with a red, white and blue banner by the dog's name. You will also receive in the mail a red, white and blue CHIC certification. This will take 4-6 weeks to process, as do the individual tests. (CERF data now appears at the OFA website as well.) Note please that the dog need not pass all portions of the CHIC to receive the certification, but will have to then be willing to reveal non-normal results to receive the CHIC. On the OFA forms there is a box the owner must check that allows OFA to release non-normal results. For PennHIP and Canadian hip data, the owner now must simply send in the appropriate screening form to OFA with a signed letter requesting the hip results be entered in the CHIC database. There is a one-time \$25 fee per dog to the CHF is required for databases like PennHIP that do not currently participate in the CHIC database.