

Breed Health Survey 2026

Statistical Report

1. Introduction

The Boxer Breed Council would like to thank everyone who contributed to the 2026 Boxer Breed Health Survey.

This report provides a statistical summary of the findings from the Breed Health Survey 2026, based on owner-reported health data for Boxer dogs across the United Kingdom. Its purpose is to present a transparent, evidence-based overview of reported health conditions, causes of death, and current health-testing practices, in order to inform breed health strategy, screening recommendations, and future research priorities.

All statistics in this report are drawn from the combined survey dataset and reflect information submitted by Boxer owners. While owner-reported data has limitations, the size of the survey provides valuable insight into health trends affecting the breed.

Key points arising from the survey include the breadth of participation across the Boxer community, the range of conditions reported, the importance of proactive health monitoring, and the need for continued collaboration between owners, breeders, clubs and health researchers.

Dataset and Methodology

Survey includes 1,066 Boxer owners covering registered, non-registered, and rescue dogs across the UK.

Health Issue Identification

Structured data collection highlights hereditary and acquired conditions affecting Boxer longevity and welfare.

Importance of Proactive Monitoring

Proactive health tracking supports breed sustainability through informed breeding and testing strategies.

Community Collaboration

Breed clubs and owners should coordinate to improve health standards and share insights into Boxer welfare.

2. Dataset and Methodology

The survey dataset comprises **1,066 valid responses**, collected from Boxer owners across the UK. Responses include dogs that are Royal Kennel Club registered, non-registered, and rescue/rehome Boxers, providing a broad representation of the population.

3. Reported Health Conditions

Cancer and allergy-related conditions were the most frequently reported categories. Digestive and orthopaedic conditions were also commonly selected, reflecting their ongoing impact on quality of life. “Heart and kidney disease, while less frequently reported, remain significant due to their association with sudden death and early mortality.” A significant number of eye-related issues are a concern; eye testing for boxers has been introduced recently but no feedback available yet.

Common Canine Cancers

Mast cell tumours, lymphoma, hemangiosarcoma, and brain tumours are frequent cancers affecting dogs’ health and lifespan.

Age and Cancer Onset

Cancers commonly appear between six and ten years, with variability complicating early detection and diagnosis.

Emotional and Financial Impact

Cancer causes significant emotional and financial challenges due to treatments like surgery and chemotherapy.

Research and Prevention

Ongoing research, early screening, and transparent breeding practices are vital to reducing cancer risks.

Prevalent Heart Conditions

Boxers frequently suffer from aortic stenosis, cardiomyopathy, murmurs, and arrhythmias which often go undetected without proper testing.

Limitations of Traditional Screening

Auscultation alone fails to reliably detect silent heart diseases, leading to unexpected sudden cardiac deaths in Boxers.

Doppler Echocardiography Benefits

Doppler echocardiography enables detailed structural and functional heart analysis, improving detection accuracy for cardiac issues.

Need for Standardised Testing

Inconsistent use of Doppler screening highlights the need for standardised protocols supported by breed clubs to reduce hereditary risks.

Kidney Disease and Juvenile Kidney Disease (JKD)

JKD Impact on Young Dogs

JKD affects dogs, often under two years, causing weight loss, increased thirst, urination, and kidney failure.

Need for Pre-Breeding Screening

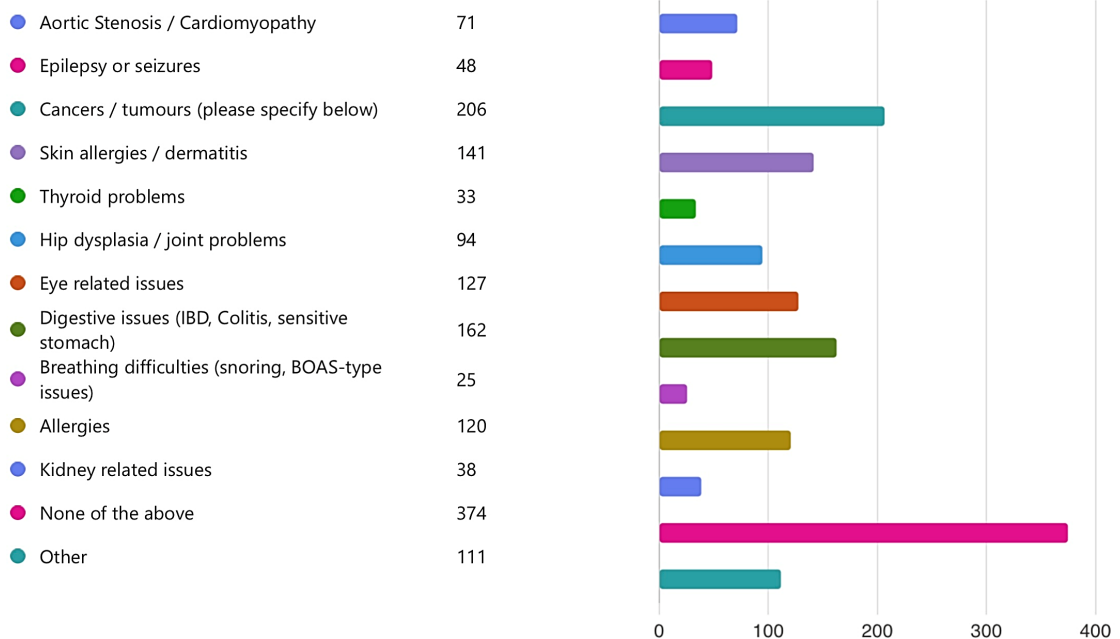
Owners advocate for compulsory kidney screening using SDMA tests and ultrasounds before breeding to detect JKD early.

Genetic Awareness and Protocols

Raising awareness of JKD’s hereditary nature and promoting uniform testing can reduce disease prevalence and improve welfare.

Questionnaire Answers

10. Has your dog ever been diagnosed with any of the following?



Frequently Prescribed Medications for Boxer Dogs

The table below details the ten most commonly reported medications prescribed for Boxer dogs. The data reflects the frequency with which owners mentioned each medication, highlighting the prevalence of treatment for allergic, pain-related, cardiac, endocrine, and neurological conditions within the surveyed population.

This list provides insight into the medical needs of Boxer dogs, as reported by owners. It does not indicate dosage, duration, or clinical outcome of treatments.

| Rank | Medication | Number of Mentions |
|------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Cytopoint | 48 |
| 2 | Gabapentin | 41 |
| 3 | Apoquel | 37 |
| 4 | Metacam | 34 |
| 5 | Vetmedin | 29 |
| 6 | Librela | 27 |
| 7 | Prednisolone / Steroids | 25 |
| 8 | Thyroxine / Thyforon | 22 |
| 9 | Phenobarbital | 18 |
| 10 | Fortekor / Benazepril | 16 |

4. Reported Causes of Death

A total of 271 respondents provided a cause of death for dogs that had passed away. Reported causes were categorised as follows:

| Disease | Number |
|---------------------|-----------|
| Cancer | 126 |
| Heart Disease | 51 |
| Other / Unspecified | 59 |
| Kidney Failure | 18 |
| Neurological Causes | 17 |

Cancer was the most frequently reported cause of death, followed by heart disease. Kidney failure and neurological causes, while less common, were notable for their association with premature loss.

Lifespan Trends in Boxers

The survey suggests that most Boxers tend to live into mid to later adulthood rather than very early life. Deaths occurring before five years of age were reported relatively infrequently, falling into a low to moderate range. A moderate number of Boxers were reported to pass away between six and seven years of age. The most common lifespan observed in the survey was between eight and eleven years, with both the eight to nine and ten to eleven-year ranges showing high relative frequency. After this point, the number of dogs living beyond eleven years gradually decreased. Deaths between twelve and thirteen years occurred at a moderate level, while Boxers living beyond thirteen years were reported less frequently.

5. Health Testing Practices

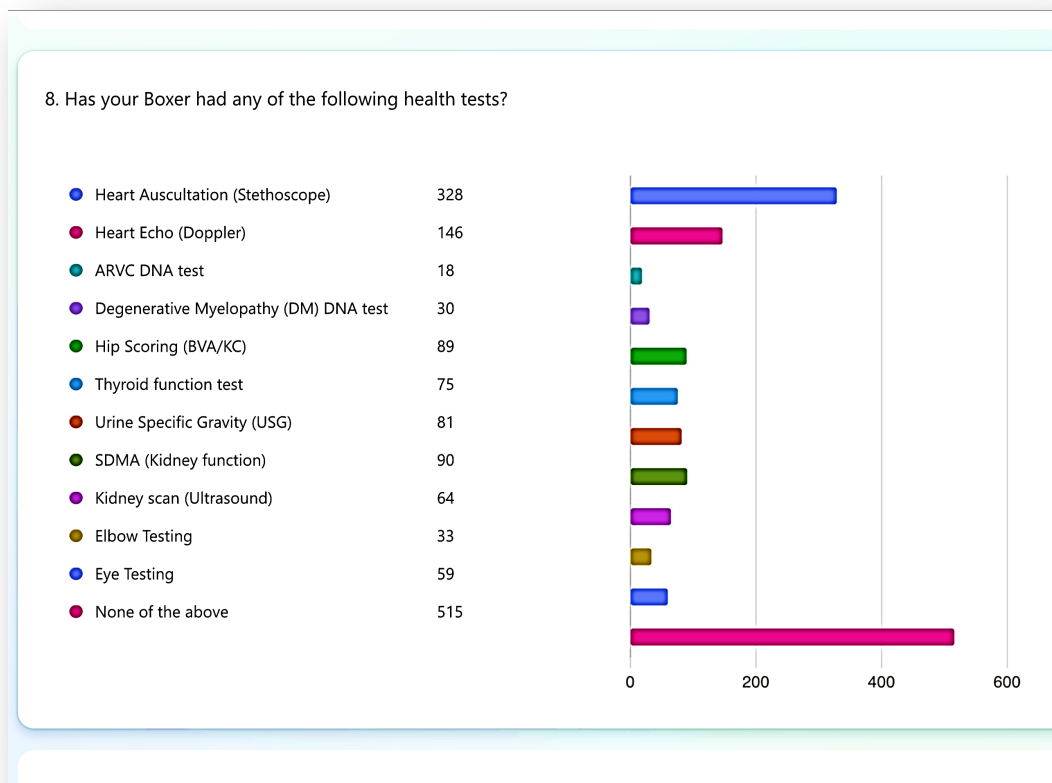
Responses to the structured health-testing question indicate the following counts:

Heart testing methods

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Auscultation | 364 |
| Doppler echocardiography | 159 |
| No heart testing selected | 37 |

While auscultation remains the most commonly reported screening method, the lower uptake of Doppler echocardiography suggests a need for improved awareness and accessibility of gold-standard cardiac testing within the breed. Almost half of respondents reported that no health tests had been carried out on their dog.

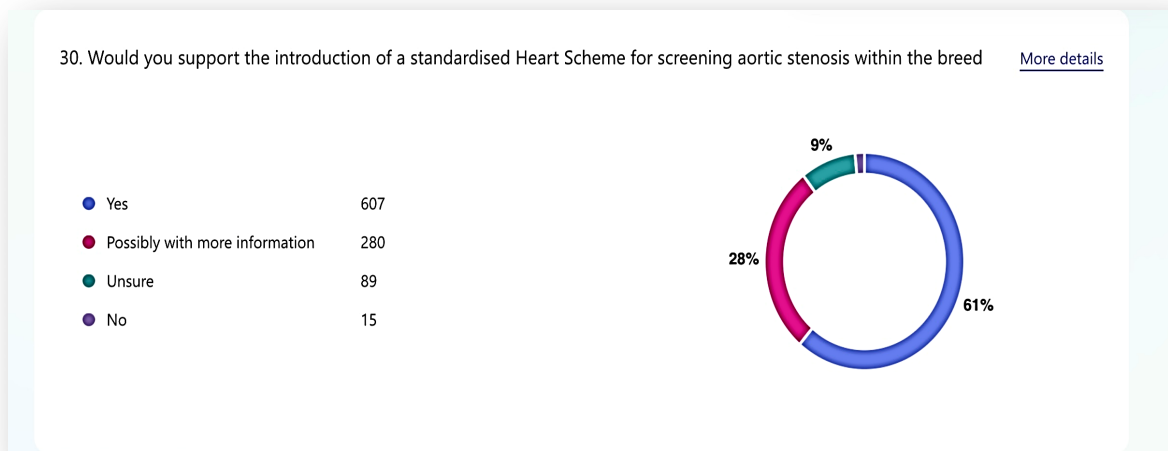
Overall health testing uptake



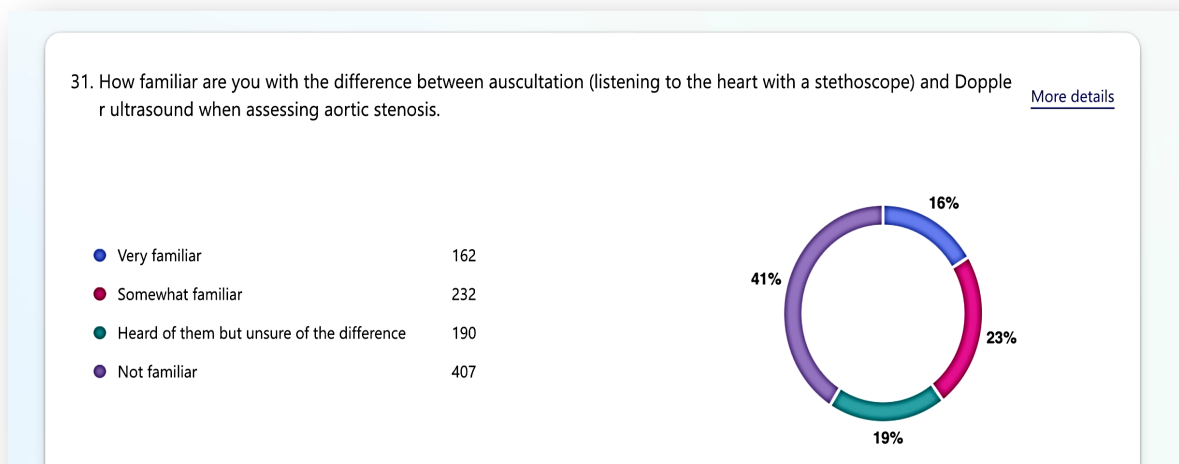
These figures highlight variability in health-testing uptake and suggest opportunities for improved standardisation and education.

Standardised Heart Testing

Would you support the introduction of a standardised Heart Scheme for screening aortic stenosis within the breed?



How familiar are you with the difference between auscultation (listening to the heart with a stethoscope) and Doppler ultrasound when assessing for aortic stenosis?

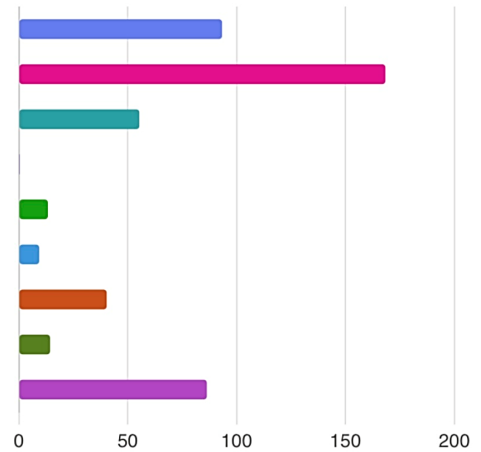


Lifestyle Factors

This section captures owner-reported information relating to lifestyle and management factors.

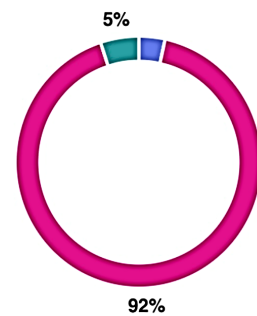
27. What if any activities do you do with your boxer / boxers

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| ● Conformation (Breed Showing) | 93 |
| ● Obedience and Good Citizen | 168 |
| ● Agility | 55 |
| ● Heelwork to Music | 0 |
| ● Canine Hoopers | 13 |
| ● Rally Obedience | 9 |
| ● Working Trials and Scentwork | 40 |
| ● Canicross | 14 |
| ● Other | 86 |



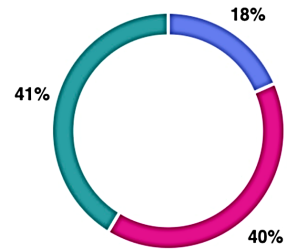
17. Body condition (owner's view):

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| ● Underweight | 34 |
| ● Ideal | 912 |
| ● Overweight | 50 |



18. Household:

| | |
|------------|-----|
| ● Urban | 182 |
| ● Suburban | 397 |
| ● Rural | 408 |



Interpretation and Limitations

All findings in this report are based on owner-reported data and reflect selections made in structured survey fields. Free-text responses may contain additional clinical detail not captured here and should be analysed separately for qualitative insights.

The survey asked respondents if they had anything they would like the Boxer Breed Council / Health Community to consider, a summary of over 170 responses follows:

Overarching Message

Owners consistently call for a decisive shift from **appearance-led breeding to health-led breeding**. There is strong concern about repeated serious illness, emotional distress, and escalating financial costs associated with owning Boxers. Many respondents feel current systems are failing to protect the breed's long-term health and welfare.

Mandatory Health Testing

There is overwhelming support for **compulsory and enforceable health testing before breeding**, rather than voluntary schemes. Owners specifically highlight the need for mandatory heart testing, kidney disease (JKD) screening, hip and elbow scoring, SDMA blood testing, and the use of generational health data. Many respondents state that recommendations without enforcement are ineffective.

Heart Disease

Heart disease is one of the most frequently raised concerns. Owners support mandatory heart testing prior to breeding, greater recognition of long-established aortic stenosis (AS) scoring, improved access to approved cardiologists, and preventing breeding from dogs with any heart abnormality. Sudden cardiac death and long-term management of heart conditions are described as emotionally devastating.

Kidney Disease (JKD)

Respondents repeatedly request increased research into JKD, compulsory screening before breeding, transparent reporting of affected bloodlines, and firm rules preventing breeding from dogs with JKD in their lines. A lack of accessible and reliable information is seen as a barrier to informed puppy purchasing.

Cancer

Cancer is perceived as **under-researched** compared with heart and kidney disease. Many owners report early-onset cancers and multiple losses within the same household. There is strong support for increased research, exploration of DNA testing, better public awareness of risk, and consideration of early detection or screening initiatives.

Breeding Practices and Regulation

Many respondents expressed frustration with irresponsible and profit-driven breeding. Suggested actions include breeder licensing, limits on the number of litters per bitch, breeding only from dogs old enough for health issues to have emerged, and firm action against illegal or unregulated breeders. KC registration without mandatory health testing is widely criticised.

Bobtails, Docking and Breed Integrity

Bobtail breeding is a recurring and contentious issue. Concerns include potential links to temperament and health problems, as well as damage to breed integrity. Views on tail docking are mixed but often framed around welfare, injury prevention, and working or rural environments.

Breed Standards, BOAS and Conformation

Owners increasingly question current breed standards, particularly in relation to brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (BOAS). There is support for longer noses, functional conformation, and breeding for longevity and heat tolerance rather than fashion. Some respondents note that healthier dogs may be penalised in the show ring.

Transparency, Records and Governance

There are repeated calls for greater transparency and accountability from breeders. Suggestions include honest disclosure of health issues, centralised medical records, monitoring of bloodlines regardless of breeder status, and closer collaboration between the Breed Council, the Royal Kennel Club, breed clubs, and researchers.

Owner Support, Education and Welfare

Respondents ask for better communication with owners, improved education for prospective buyers about the true cost and commitment of owning a Boxer, increased veterinary awareness of breed-specific issues, and greater emotional support for owners following sudden loss. Positive Boxer traits and temperament are also highlighted as needing better recognition.

Conclusion

The feedback reflects **deep affection for the Boxer breed alongside serious concern for its future**. Owners want clear, enforceable action on health testing, breeder accountability, transparency, and education to improve welfare, longevity, and trust in the breed.

Report Summary for Boxer Owners

The **Breed Health Survey 2026** brings together health information from **over 1,000 Boxer owners across the UK**, including dogs that are Kennel Club registered, non-registered, and rescue Boxers. The survey helps build a clearer picture of the most common health issues affecting the breed today, how long Boxers typically live, and how often health testing is being carried out.

Cancer was the most commonly reported health problem and the leading cause of death in the survey. Many owners reported cancers such as mast cell tumours, lymphoma, and other serious conditions, most often developing in middle to later life. Heart disease was the second most common cause of death, underlining the importance of detecting heart conditions early, particularly those that may not be picked up by listening alone.

Kidney disease, including juvenile kidney disease (JKD), was highlighted as a serious concern because it can affect young dogs and has significant welfare consequences. Owners also frequently reported allergies, digestive problems, orthopaedic issues, and neurological conditions, many of which require long-term treatment and ongoing veterinary care.

Most Boxers in the survey lived into adulthood, with the greatest number reaching between eight and eleven years of age. Early deaths were reported less often, while fewer dogs were reported to live beyond eleven years.

The survey also showed differences in how health testing is used. While many dogs had basic heart checks, fewer had Doppler heart scans, which are more effective at detecting hidden heart problems. These results highlight the value of regular, thorough health testing and open conversations between owners, breeders, and veterinarians.

Overall, the Breed Health Survey 2026 helps Boxer owners better understand the health challenges facing the breed and supports informed decisions about care, testing, and responsible breeding to improve Boxer health and welfare for the future.

Common Health Challenges

Boxers often face cancer, heart disease, kidney problems, allergies, digestive and orthopaedic issues affecting their wellbeing.

Importance of Early Detection

Early and regular health checks help recognize subtle behavioural changes indicating emerging illnesses in Boxers.

Proactive Health Testing

Comprehensive tests like Doppler heart scans and kidney assessments are vital for detecting hidden Boxer health issues.

Supporting Responsible Breeding

Owners should ask breeders about health testing and promote transparency to encourage healthier Boxer breeding practices.

Conclusion

The Breed Health Survey 2026 provides a robust evidence base drawn from over 1,000 Boxer owners. Cancer, cardiac disease, kidney disease, and chronic conditions affecting comfort and longevity continue to represent key challenges for the breed. The findings reinforce the value of structured health screening, particularly for heart and kidney conditions, and support ongoing efforts to develop clear, standardised testing recommendations.

Latest Health News

Following this survey the Royal Kennel Club announced that boxers have now been included in the University of Cambridge Respiratory Function Grading Scheme (RFGS). This scheme assesses dogs for a breathing problem known as BOAS (Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome). As a formal scheme results can be now seen on the RKC website.

Heart testing

Following on from a Boxer Heart Day in October 2025, the Royal Kennel Club, the Veterinary Cardiology Society together and the Boxer Breed Council are in discussion and looking at the feasibility of a formal heart scheme for our breed.