

Working Dog Wellness Check-ups — Handler Checklist

What working-dog wellness actually covers.

A working or sport dog has a different physiology and a different risk profile than a pet. Standard annual exams miss the things that end careers.

Use cases & applications

Protection & patrol K9

For: Departments, EP firms

Joint and back screening, dental check (broken canines end careers), bite-power assessment.

Sport dogs in active training

For: IGP, French Ring, Mondio handlers

Conditioning baselines, recovery markers, and pre-trial soundness checks.

Detection & SAR dogs

For: Handler teams in deployment

Cardiac, respiratory, and orthopedic screening for high-endurance field work.

Handler how-tos

Build a working-dog health log

- 1** Baseline weight, body condition score, and resting heart rate at age 2. These are your reference points.
- 2** Photograph teeth quarterly — broken canines and slab fractures are common and often missed.
- 3** Track recovery time after a hard training session. A trend toward slower recovery is the first injury sign.
- 4** OFA hips and elbows at 24 months. Repeat radiographs every 3 years on hard-working dogs.
- 5** Annual full blood panel with thyroid. Subclinical hypothyroid is the most-missed performance issue in working dogs.

Field checklist (check as completed):

- ☐ Baseline weight, body condition score, and resting heart rate at age 2. These are your reference points.
- ☐ Photograph teeth quarterly — broken canines and slab fractures are common and often missed.
- ☐ Track recovery time after a hard training session. A trend toward slower recovery is the first injury sign.
- ☐ OFA hips and elbows at 24 months. Repeat radiographs every 3 years on hard-working dogs.
- ☐ Annual full blood panel with thyroid. Subclinical hypothyroid is the most-missed performance issue in working dogs.

Safety notes

Read before every session. These are non-negotiable.

- ! Coordinate findings with the dog's primary DVM — we complement, not replace.
- ! Working dogs should have baseline data established by age 2.
- ! Repeat OFA radiographs every 3 years on hard-working dogs.
- ! Pull a dog from work for any unresolved soundness concern — push through equals career-ending injury.

For agencies & operators

- Department-wide K9 wellness contracts with annual fitness-for-duty exams.
- Pre-purchase exams for handlers acquiring green or titled dogs.
- Sport-medicine referrals to vets who actually work on working dogs.

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This checklist is a working reference. It does not replace hands-on coaching from a qualified trainer.