Degenerative Myelopathy (DM) is a progressive neurological disorder that affects the spinal cord of dogs as nerve cells responsible for sending and receiving signals from the brain breakdown. It is a devastating and heartbreaking disease that causes progressive paralysis. The nerves along the dog’s spine are affected, so there is in no physical pain unless sores result from the dog dragging themselves on the ground.

The onset of the disease typically occurs between the ages of 8 to 14 years of age and it can progress rapidly leaving the dog unable to walk in 6 to 12 months. It begins with an unsteady gait causing the dog to wobble. It can begin in one rear leg before progressing to the other rear leg. The dog will begin to ‘knuckle over,’ meaning the rear foot will not break over as usual resulting in the foot being drug with the top of the foot rubbing the ground before the dog is able to pull the foot back onto the pad of the foot. As the disease progresses the dog is unable to control the foot. Eventually, as the dog looses control of its back legs, the legs are drug behind.

The disease progresses up the spine and eventually the dog is unable to control its bladder. As the diseases progresses other organs and the front legs become involved.

DNA testing reveals if a dog will possibly develop DM. DM requires a dog have two copies of the defective gene.

Clear test results (n/n) - The dog does not have the defective gene for DM.

Carrier test results (DM/n) - The dog has 1 defective gene for DM and 1 normal/clear gene.

At Risk results (DM/DM) - The dog has 2 defective genes for DM. This dog may or may not develop DM, but the potential is there.
For breeding purposes, using a dog that is a carrier (DM/n) does not mean that dog should not be used. A responsible breeder can use a carrier (DM/n) for breeding provided the dog that it is bred with is clear, resulting in the puppies being either clear (n/n) or carriers (DM/n), thus free of the disease.

A responsible breeder will not want to risk producing dogs the are at risk (DM/DM) and will strive to provide puppies that will provide many years of health and enjoyment to their family.