

Dear Sir,

As you will be aware, from January 1st 2012 the regulations under the PETS scheme for dogs and cats entering the UK will change. Whilst it is anticipated that tapeworm treatment prior to entry will be retained with the agreement of the European Parliament, tick treatment will no longer be necessary.

Every effort needs to be made to ensure that the European Parliament approves the retention of tapeworm treatment, as the risk of *E. multilocularis* being introduced into the UK is considerably diminished by a tapeworm treatment (Torgerson and Craig, 2009).

It is our concern that removal of the requirement to treat animals with an approved acaricide before they enter the UK is likely to result in the establishment of certain notorious disease vector ticks in the UK. One tick in particular, *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*, the brown dog tick, originally endemic in warmer climates, is endophilic and zoonotic (Dantes-Torres, 2008) being associated with dog accommodation and human households. This species has become established worldwide, but there have been only sporadic reports so far in the UK.

In 2007, one of the authors visited a house in southern England that had become infested with this species after the owner brought his two Cavalier King Charles spaniels back from a holiday in France the previous year. This occurred after tick treatment prior to re-entry into the UK, presumably because one or two ticks survived. The infestation had established to the extent that the owner was able to almost fill a universal tube with ticks removed from the two dogs. Ticks were living primarily in the Aga-heated kitchen of his house, and had transferred by means of visiting dogs to a second household and its dog. Elimination of the infestation was costly in time and money, involving regular treatment of the dogs and also the environment. Should they become widely established, however, it is the ability of *R. sanguineus* and other species to transmit a range of pathogenic organisms that is most disturbing. For example *R. sanguineus* transmits *Babesia canis vogeli* and *Ehrlichia canis*, both of which cause serious disease. Canine babesiosis has been increasingly reported in the UK since the introduction of PETS in 2001 (Shaw and others 2003) and was recorded for the

first time in an untravelling British dog from Ashford, Kent in 2006, which proved to be a fatal case (Holm and others, 2006).

While such incidents have so far been rare, they do indicate the ability of exotic ticks to establish in the UK and/or transmit disease, despite current treatment legislation. It is therefore of great concern to veterinarians and pet owners alike that many thousands of animals could enter the UK each year, without any compulsion to treat against ticks. Given that pet dogs commonly carry ticks without their owners' knowledge (Smith and others, 2011), this will inevitably increase the risk of exotic ticks entering the UK.

ESCCAP UK will be hosting a meeting on the 28th October 2011 (at Engineers' House, Bristol) to explore further the risks and opportunities that the new regulations will present. It will include consideration of rabies and parasite control, together with best practice. The resources that ESCCAP UK offers will be highlighted, particularly the new website that has been designed to inform vets and pet owners of the parasite risks whilst travelling to specific locations (www.esccapuk.org.uk). Anyone interested in attending can email info@esccapuk.org.uk.

The authors would also draw the reader's attention to the resources available from the BSAVA and BVA, and thank these two organisations for their continued work to ensure that *E. multilocularis* does not enter the UK.

Yours faithfully

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