

EXOTIC DISEASES: INFORMATION FOR PET OWNERS

IMPORTANT NEWS FOR OWNERS OF ANIMALS TRAVELLING ABROAD!

The bad news:

Since the Pets Travel Scheme (PETS) was introduced in 2000, there have been an increasing number of animals returning to the UK with 'exotic' diseases. There is concern that some of these diseases are becoming endemic to the UK with potentially serious consequences for both human and animal health.

The following lists some of these diseases and how pets may pick up infection:

DISEASE	SPREAD BY
Leishmaniosis	Sandflies
Heartworm	Mosquitoes
Babesiosis	Ticks
Ehrlichiosis	Ticks
<i>Echinococcus multilocularis</i> tapeworm	Small rodents (if eaten)
Rabies	Bite/saliva from another infected animal

The current PETS legislation requires that animals travelling abroad are vaccinated against rabies and are treated for ticks and tapeworms before re-entering the UK. From the 1st January 2012 the compulsory requirement to treat for ticks before entering the UK is being lifted. The aim of the PETS legislation has always been to protect human health rather than animal health and following these guidelines alone will not guarantee the health of animals travelling abroad.

The distribution of many of the above 'exotic' diseases is changing rapidly. This may be due to better surveillance and diagnosis, which allows us to map parasite and disease distribution better, but it may also be due to changing climates allowing vectors, e.g. mosquitoes, to increase their geographical range. Increased animal travel generally allows greater spread of disease, just as human travel can increase the spread of disease.

The good news:

More information is now available to UK vets to help us assess the risk of disease to animals travelling abroad and we are now better able to advise pet owners on disease prevention protocols. There are a number of products available that can help reduce the risk of pet exposure to insects and ticks that spread disease, and for the control of tapeworms which can present potentially serious problems for human health should infected dogs enter the UK. However there is no single treatment that covers all the parasites. An assessment of the risks facing each pet is needed, which will depend on which countries the pet will be going to and the time of year the travel will be taking place.

If you would like to receive further advice about appropriate disease prevention measures for your pets whilst travelling abroad, please contact your veterinary practice and ask for a **Travel Clinic** appointment with an OV vet (DEFRA approved Official Veterinarians). Please bring to the clinic all the PETS travel documentation that you currently have and your planned itinerary.

Ideally, the **travel clinic appointment should be made at least two weeks, preferably one month, before your intended departure** abroad as some of the disease prevention products need to be given well before potential exposure to the disease transmitting agents. Exotic disease prevention and treatment is a fast moving field of veterinary medicine. To ensure your pet is well protected against disease, we recommend contacting your veterinary practice before each trip abroad to check whether the advice regarding disease prevention protocols has changed and to **confirm that your pet's microchip is still active.**