

PET TRAVEL SCHEME: TICK TREATMENT RULES FROM 1st JANUARY 2012

I have heard that the requirement to treat animals travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) for ticks before coming into the UK has changed. Is this correct?

Yes, from 1st January 2012 under the new PETS rules, there is no longer a compulsory requirement to treat cats or dogs with tick treatments before entering the UK.

Why has this change been made?

It has been difficult to make a water-tight scientific case for the continuation of compulsory tick treatments for animals entering the UK. Over the past decade exotic ticks and their tick borne diseases have occasionally been identified in the UK and ticks can also enter this country on farm animals.

Does this mean that I can forget about tick treatment for my pets?

No. In fact it remains critically important for the health and welfare of both animals and people that exotic ticks, especially the **brown dog tick** (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*), do not enter and establish in the UK.

How are these exotic ticks harmful?

The brown dog tick can transmit a disease called **babesiosis** via its bite. Babesia are microscopic parasites that live in red blood cells and can cause serious illness in both animals and people. In the acute form of the disease, Babesia cause sudden rupture of red blood cells resulting in a life threatening form of anaemia. In the subacute or chronic forms, animals are anaemic, lethargic and debilitated. Diagnostic tests often show kidney and liver damage caused by the Babesia.

But surely exotic ticks won't be able to live in colder climates such as that of the UK?

Unfortunately, some species of exotic ticks can survive very easily in the UK's climate. Indeed the brown dog tick can even live out its entire lifecycle in a home, successfully breeding and re-infecting the same or other pets and people within a household.

Are you saying that ticks can spread diseases to people?

Yes, as well as babesiosis, ticks carry **Lyme Disease** caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi* which can affect both people and animals. Lyme disease causes flu like symptoms on initial infection. Left untreated, muscles, joints, the heart and nervous system can become affected. Lyme disease is already present in the UK, therefore there is a need for pet owners to be vigilant about tick control even if their pet never travels overseas.

A 'zoonosis' is the technical term for an infectious disease in animals that can be transmitted to people, and where the animal is the natural reservoir for the infectious agent. Further information about zoonotic parasites and what you can do to prevent you and your pet from contracting them can be found on the following website:

www.esccapuk.org.uk

Is it easy to treat babesiosis?

There are currently no medicines licensed for the treatment of babesiosis in the UK and very few vets currently have immediate access to suitable medicines to ensure prompt treatment of affected animals. Vets have to request permission from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to import the necessary medicines. Severely affected animals often require intensive nursing and supportive care so the cost of treating an animal with babesiosis can be substantial. There is no guarantee that affected animals will survive the infection.

Summary

- The compulsory requirement to treat pets coming into the UK under the PETS scheme for ticks will be removed from 1st January 2012.
- The need to treat pets for ticks for animal and human health and welfare reasons remains as strong as ever.
- ESCCAP UK urges pet owners to work with their vets to ensure that every animal travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme is given suitable protection so that animals coming into the UK do not bring harmful parasites or parasite transmissible diseases with them.
- Visit www.esccapuk.org.uk for further information about pet parasites, the problems they cause and how you can prevent parasites from harming your pet and your family.