

# Taking your pets abroad

Your guide  
to diseases  
encountered  
abroad



**BVA ANIMAL  
WELFARE  
FOUNDATION**

Produced by the

**BVA Animal Welfare  
Foundation**

[www.bva-awf.org.uk](http://www.bva-awf.org.uk)

Registered charity 287118

In association with the

Veterinary Advisory Group  
to the Association of British  
Insurers Pet Insurance Forum



## PET TRAVEL SCHEME

The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS), which permits the re-entry of animals to the UK without entering quarantine, has revolutionised our attitudes to and the practicality of taking pets abroad.



Quarantine was an efficient barrier not only to rabies but also many other exotic diseases that are common overseas but absent from home. Many diseases occurring abroad, but not seen in the UK, are transmitted by biting insects and ticks.

British pets abroad will not have met these diseases before and are likely to be highly susceptible. This information leaflet is to advise travellers about the risks and prevention of some common diseases.

## BVA ANIMAL WELFARE FOUNDATION

The BVA AWF is the veterinary profession's charity committed to improving the welfare of animals through veterinary science, education and debate. For further information or to make a donation please visit [www.bva-awf.org.uk](http://www.bva-awf.org.uk) or call 020 7636 6541.



## THANK YOU

The BVA AWF would like to thank Professor Sandy Trees at the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool and Ms Susan Shaw at Bristol University Department of Veterinary Clinical Science, for helping to compile this leaflet, as well as Merial Animal Health for providing many of the photographs used.



Leishmaniasis

## LEISHMANIASIS

Leishmaniasis is an infectious disease transmitted by sandflies. It occurs commonly throughout the tropics and especially the Mediterranean coastal areas. The disease is caused by a protozoan parasite, which is taken in by the bloodsucking insect when it feeds on an infected dog and completes part of its life cycle in the sandfly's gut.

Most common symptoms include dermatitis and skin infection, weight loss and eye, liver and kidney disease. If untreated the disease is fatal and even with therapy affected animals may remain permanently infected. Symptoms can develop from a few months to several years after a visit abroad. Diagnosis can be confirmed by testing blood or tissue samples.

Sandflies have a limited range and therefore local knowledge is useful before visiting an area. Sandflies feed at night and are more active in summer. Their range is increasing. Contacting a local veterinarian is recommended to assess the risk.

### PREVENTION OF LEISHMANIASIS:

- Avoid 'high-risk' areas; leave your dog at home in the UK if necessary
- Keep animals indoors from one hour before dusk until one hour after sunrise. Use insecticides to control flies inside
- Sandfly repellents are available from your vet. Start treatment at least three weeks before travelling and continue when abroad – always use according to the manufacturer's recommendations.





© Adrian Assalve | Stockphoto.com

## LEISHMANIASIS (continued)

Make sure that you have an accurate weight for your dog so that the right amount of preventative therapy is administered and that you apply it correctly. If in doubt, speak to your vet or vet nurse

- Repellents alone cannot completely protect all pets from sandflies
- There is no vaccine
- Consult your vet if symptoms appear, even if this happens months to years after your dog has visited a country where this disease occurs.

## HEARTWORM

Heartworm is a disease primarily of dogs, although cats are also at risk. It is transmitted by certain mosquitoes and has a worldwide distribution including southern Europe.

Once the immature worms enter the dog's skin, they will develop and migrate over several months to the pulmonary artery which provides the blood supply to the lungs. Less commonly, infection can occur in other parts of the dog's body and in very severe cases they may also clog up the right side of the heart.

Signs of infection usually appear over several months to years depending on the severity of infection. These include weakness during exercise, coughing, weight loss, and occasionally right-sided heart failure or sudden death from lung haemorrhage.

Treatment once the dog is infected is difficult and may be associated with side effects.

Cats may also be affected although signs of the disease are more variable.

Diagnosis can be confirmed by testing blood samples.



© iStockphoto.com

### PREVENTION OF HEARTWORM:

- Avoid mosquito-infested areas
- Ask your vet about preventative treatment. There are several safe and efficient preventative medicines available. They should be started at least three weeks before travelling and continue according to manufacturer's recommendations while the dog is away and for at least a month after return
- If your dog or cat has been exposed to infection without preventative treatment – even if it was some months ago – have a blood sample analysed; infections are far easier and safer to treat before major symptoms arise
- Consult your vet if symptoms appear, even if this happens months to years after your dog or cat has visited a country where this disease occurs.



### BABESIOSIS

This disease is principally a problem in dogs and is transmitted by certain ticks. These are relatively common in southern and central Europe and are extending further north with climate change.

When the tick feeds, saliva is injected into the host together with the *Babesia* organisms, which invade and multiply in red blood cells. A tick biting an infected animal will become infected itself, and can go on to infect other dogs.

Affected animals develop fever, anaemia, weakness, lethargy, weight loss, loss of appetite and red or dark brown urine. This can be associated with jaundice (yellow gums). Without treatment, death can occur.



Ticks attached to a dog

### **BABESIOSIS** (continued)

Diagnosis can be confirmed by blood sample testing. Treatment is by specific drugs in addition to supportive treatment such as blood transfusions in severely anaemic dogs.

### **EHRlichiosis**

Ehrlichiosis is transmitted by certain ticks. A tick biting an infected animal will become infected itself, and can go on to infect other dogs.

This disease is widely distributed throughout the world, including many countries of southern Europe. Symptoms of this disease vary widely and may include depression, fever, swollen glands and bleeding into the eyes, from the nose, into the skin (bruising) and elsewhere. Less common signs include vomiting, nasal discharge, lameness and severe inflammatory changes in the eyes. Chronic infections may progress to chronic debility, weight loss, arthritis and neurological disease including convulsions.

Diagnosis is confirmed by testing a blood sample. Treatment is by antibiotics in the early stages. Cases of longstanding infection are less likely to respond and affected dogs may develop serious problems with their bone marrow.

### **HEPATOZOONOSIS**

This is a relatively widespread disease of dogs (less commonly cats) with a global distribution in warmer climates, including the countries bordering the Mediterranean.



© Gill Harris, BVA

It is caused by a protozoan parasite and transmitted to dogs by grooming off and swallowing infected ticks. Many infected dogs do not show signs of disease unless they have other diseases causing immunosuppression. Infection is diagnosed by testing a blood sample.

Treatment is difficult and requires access to drugs which may not always be available.



#### **TICK CONTROL:**

- Avoid known severely affected tick habitats
- Feed your pet commercial diet and prevent scavenging and hunting behaviour
- Specific sprays, impregnated collars and spot-on medication are available from your vet – always use these according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Start treatment at least three weeks before travelling and continue when abroad. Make sure that you have an accurate weight for your dog so that the right amount of preventative therapy is administered and that you apply it correctly. If in doubt, speak to your vet or vet nurse
- Be sure to check your dog daily for ticks and remove any that you see using a proper tick removal device
- Under PETS, tick treatment must also be carried out by a veterinarian between 24 to 48 hours before returning to the UK
- Consult your vet if symptoms appear, always making it clear if your dog has been to a country where this disease might occur.

## UNDER PETS ANIMALS MUST BE:

- Positively identified by means of a microchip
- Vaccinated against rabies
- Blood sampled to prove they have responded to vaccination
- After six months they are allowed to re-enter the UK.

Certain other provisions must be observed in the 24 to 48 hours *before* returning to the UK. These are:

- Treatment for tapeworms to prevent the entry into the UK of the parasite *Echinococcus multilocularis*, which is carried by many foxes abroad, can be transmitted to dogs and can cause potentially fatal disease in humans
- Treatment for ticks, which may carry exotic diseases into the UK.

Treatments must be undertaken and certified by a suitably qualified veterinarian.

The detailed rules of PETS with regard to documentation, procedures and participating countries are evolving constantly and it is a good idea to consult your vet and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) PETS website for the most up-to-date advice. Pet owners should also inform their vet that they have travelled abroad with their pet should any illness develop following their return to the UK. Ensure that your pet is fully covered by pet health insurance and that you check that this cover extends to trips abroad.

**This leaflet outlines some of the more common diseases encountered abroad. The advice is very generalised and in all cases pet owners are advised to ask their own vet for specific advice before travelling abroad.**

## FURTHER INFORMATION ON PETS

If you would like further information on PETS then please contact DEFRA:

Tel: 0870 241 1710

Email: [quarantine@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:quarantine@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/index.htm)