

EUROPE

HEALTH ADVICE FOR DOGS AND CATS

TRAVELLING TO EUROPE

(revised Jan 2012)



Under the new P.E.T.S. legislation it is now possible to take cats and dogs to certain countries in Europe and return them to the UK without the need for 6 months quarantine PROVIDING THAT they have been correctly microchipped, vaccinated against rabies and certificated under the scheme (for details of the requirements under the P.E.T.S. scheme please ask at Reception for the 'PETS travel scheme' Information sheet).

The majority of vets now agree that the scheme should provide excellent protection against rabies. However, there are other serious infectious diseases of dogs and cats in Europe not currently present in the UK which can represent a significant hazard to your pets' health. The aim of this information sheet is to tell you about the most serious of these diseases and what you can do to minimise the risks to your pet.

There are five significant diseases you should be aware of:

(1) HEARTWORM

Caused by a microscopic nematode worm *Dirofilaria immitis*. It is present throughout Europe. The disease is transmitted by mosquitoes. The worms then migrate to the chest where they can cause serious heart disease.

Protecting against heartworm

There are several drugs licensed in the UK against heartworm. Some are of the "spot-on" variety such as **STRONGHOLD** or **ADVANTAGE**. The other is a worming preparation called **MILBEMAX**. Either should be administered at least one month before travelling to Europe, administered every 4 weeks whilst abroad and continued for at least one month after return to UK. Of the two, **MILBEMAX** is probably the most effective and has the added advantage of controlling the tapeworm *Echinococcus* (see below).

(2) EHRlichOSIS

Caused by a blood parasite *Ehrlichia canis*. Its European distribution is similar to that for heartworm i.e. throughout Europe. The disease is transmitted by ticks and gets into the bloodstream where it can cause fever and a variety of blood disorders. Many animals recover spontaneously but others (particularly German Shepherd dogs and young animals) can become persistently infected and chronically ill.

Protection against Ehrlichia

Prevention is aimed at controlling the ticks that transmit the disease. In the UK the most effective product for tick control is **FRONTLINE** either as a spray or spot-on preparation. It should be administered every 4 weeks. If you are travelling to an area where infection with this parasite is known to be a particular problem then prophylactic antibiotic medication can be used.

(3) BABESIOSIS

Caused by the blood parasite *Babesia canis*. This is similar to Ehrlichiosis; it is also a blood parasite and is transmitted by ticks. It is more widespread throughout Europe. Treatment is difficult and often unsuccessful.

Protection against Babesia

Prevention is best achieved by tick control - see under Ehrlichiosis. A vaccine and prophylactic antibiotics for this disease are available in France but not in the UK. If you are travelling to an area with a particular problem with this disease you should seek local veterinary advice.

(4) LEISHMANIASIS

Caused by a parasite *Leishmania*. This disease occurs in southern Europe especially round the Mediterranean coast and islands. This tends to be a slow chronic disease which may not manifest until months or even years after infection. It can cause a variety of problems including skin problems, eye infections, kidney disease and joint pains.

Disease is usually chronic, treatment is expensive and rarely successful. The most serious aspect of Leishmaniasis is that it is zoonotic i.e. it can be transmitted from animals to humans and children are particularly vulnerable.

Consequently, most animals positively diagnosed with leishmaniasis are put to sleep. The disease is transmitted by sandflies.

Prevention of Leishmania

Insecticidal collars containing deltamethrin appear to be very effective at controlling sandflies; it is sold under the name **SCALIBOR. N.B. NOT FOR USE IN CATS.** In addition, sandflies are nocturnal and usually found outdoors so keeping dogs animals indoors at night should help reduce the risk of disease. Sandflies also dislike moving air so that a fan kept in the room in which your pet sleeps would offer some additional protection.

A vaccine against Leishmania is now available, if you are spending any length of time in endemic areas it would be worth considering this. Please ask at Reception for details.

(5) ECHINOCOCCUS MULTILOCULARIS

Echinococcus is a tapeworm, which inhabits the intestines. The parasite causes minimal harm to dogs but the parasite can be passed on to man in whom it can cause fatal disease. It is for this reason that it is sensible to treat dogs regularly to keep them free of this parasite and why it is compulsory for treatment to be given before return to the UK.

Control of Echinococcus

Monthly treatment with the drug praziquantel is highly effective. Preparations containing praziquantel include Droncit, Drontal and Milbemax.

SUMMARY

As these diseases are transmitted by insects control measures will usually be needed from March to November:

- (1) Administer **Milbemax** every month starting 1 month before travelling and continuing for at least 1 month after return
- (2) Administer **Frontline** every month whilst abroad
- (3) If visiting Southern Europe use a **Scalibor** collar (**DOGS ONLY**) and keep animals indoors at night with a fan in these areas
- (4) Seek local veterinary advice to find out if any other regular treatment is recommended in the area in which you are staying.

Inform your vet that your pet has been abroad and that this has been noted on your records. Veterinary surgeons and veterinary laboratories do not routinely check for these diseases and they can easily be missed if your vet is not aware that your pet has been to Europe.