

# Imported disease — the threat to dogs

The Pet Travel Scheme has made it easier for dog owners to travel abroad with their dogs. **David Crane** of Willows Veterinary Group highlights the risks

It is easier to move from country to country with our pets, but the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) also permits the movement of pet animals back to the UK without the need for quarantine.

Most people will instantly think of rabies when thinking of overseas diseases but there are several more to be aware of, many of which are transmitted by biting insects and ticks. Pets living in the UK will not have met these diseases before and are therefore more likely to be susceptible.

## TREATMENT ISSUES

Many of these exotic diseases do not have licensed veterinary medicines available in the UK, which means that there can sometimes be a delay in obtaining the correct drugs to treat them as they also need to be imported from abroad.

## BABESIOSIS

Babesiosis is a disease transmitted by ticks and is relatively common in Europe. 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. 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 also transmitted by ticks. This disease is widely distributed throughout the world, including many countries of southern Europe.

The 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 a blood test. 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

Hepatozoonosis is a relatively widespread disease with a global distribution in warmer climates, including the countries bordering the Mediterranean.

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 immuno-suppression.

Diagnosis is confirmed by a blood test. Treatment is difficult and requires access to drugs which may not always be available.

## LEISHMANIASIS

Leishmaniasis is an infectious disease transmitted by sandflies. It occurs commonly throughout the tropics and especially the Mediterranean coastal areas.

Despite its name, the sandfly lives predominantly in wooded areas. The disease is

caused by a protozoan parasite, which is transmitted between infected and non-infected dogs by the bloodsucking sandfly. Part of the parasite's life cycle is in the sandfly's gut. Most common symptoms include skin inflammation and infection. If left 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.

## HEARTWORM

Heartworm is transmitted by mosquitoes and has a worldwide distribution including southern Europe.

Once the immature worms enter the dog's skin, they will develop and migrate to the major blood vessels close to 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.

Diagnosis can be confirmed by a blood test.



## TAPEWORM

Tapeworm can easily infect dogs while abroad and although the adult parasite produces no clinical signs in dogs, it can cause a potentially fatal condition in humans.

This particular tapeworm (*alveolar echinococcosis*) is not present in the UK and so to help keep it out and prevent it becoming established in wildlife (mainly foxes) it is important that you treat your dog regularly with a wormer containing praziquantel. It is a requirement under EU law that your dog is treated with this wormer by a vet between 24 hours and 120 hours (one and five days) before returning to the UK.

Contact the Willows Veterinary Group on 01606 723204.



Willows Veterinary Group

www.willowsvetgroup.co.uk

## TIPS FOR SQPS

### Advice for clients taking animals to at-risk areas (primarily Southern Europe)

- 1 As lots of the diseases are tick-borne, advise owners to check their animal daily for signs of ticks and, if possible, avoid long grass and wooded areas if they are picking up ticks.
- 2 Buy a tick hook/tweezers so the ticks can be safely removed without damage and the tick's head won't be left behind.
- 3 Avoid letting the animals out around dusk and dawn when sandflies are most active.
- 4 Contact a vet for advice on preventative treatments (eg tick/sandfly repellents and worming products) before the animals travel abroad.