

# Be aware of disease risks to you and your pets

Disease threats from abroad – and those in the UK – can be a risk to pets and people, as **Bruce Waddell** of Willows Veterinary Group explains

Thanks to an effective awareness campaign, everybody has heard about rabies, but sadly most people think this is the only disease their pet can catch from a trip overseas. Due to better education and better vaccines, the truth is that rabies is actually quite rare and also quite difficult for an animal to catch, as they can only catch the disease from direct contact with another infected animal.

When pets are abroad they are far more likely to get diseases that are spread by insects – usually mosquitoes and ticks, or by ingesting worms. Although the diseases do not result in the dramatic symptoms associated with rabies they can still be fatal and some diseases can be passed on to humans.

## TAPEWORM

The tapeworm *Echinococcus multilocularis* is common throughout Europe and further afield and is widely found in both domestic dogs and foxes. The tapeworms live in the host animal and produce hundreds of eggs which are shed in the animal's faeces. These are, in turn, eaten by rodents which become an intermediary host. When a dog eats these rodents, they themselves become infected and cysts can develop in the animal's vital organs.



The hedgehog tick *I hexagonus* can carry Lyme disease

It is essential that animals are given a suitable tapeworm treatment before travelling and while abroad and under the rules of the Pet Travel Scheme a dog must be treated by a vet for *Echinococcus multilocularis* before returning to the UK. Tapeworms can be passed on to humans, so owners must observe high standards of hygiene.

## LEISHMANIASIS

Leishmaniasis is a disease spread by sandflies, which are commonly found in wooded areas and gardens rather than on beaches. It is common around the Mediterranean and the number of cases has increased in recent years. The disease can cause weight loss, hair loss around the eyes and

nose, lameness, skin and eye lesions and enlarged lymph nodes. It can take up to six years from the initial infection for the disease to develop.

## BABESIOSIS

Babesiosis is a parasite spread by ticks and is seen throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and the Middle East. The parasite lives in the host's red blood cells and causes anaemia and can come on suddenly. To become infected the infected tick has to feed on the animal for 24 to 48 hours

so it is essential that, when abroad, dogs are checked for ticks each day and any ticks found are removed promptly.

## ERLICHIOSIS

Erlinchiosis is another parasite transmitted through ticks and is found in all Mediterranean countries. Erlinchiosis infects the host's white blood cells and initially causes a fever. In some dogs this is the only symptom and they recover completely whereas other dogs remain infected. There can be long-term problems

with immune suppression and their blood clotting systems.

## LYME DISEASE

Lyme disease is yet another disease spread by ticks. It is endemic in the UK and also Europe, USA and other parts of the world. The hosts for the disease can be dogs, cattle, horses, dogs and humans. In dogs the symptoms can include lethargy, loss of appetite, fever, arthritis and swollen lymph nodes.

## HEARTWORM

Heartworm is a disease spread by mosquitos and is common in Australia, America, Asia, Japan, Italy, Spain and France. Symptoms, including heart failure and breathing problems, are generally not seen for six to 12 months after infection.

Contact the Willows Veterinary Group on 01606 723202.



## TIPS FOR SQPS

- Urge clients to take a tick-removing tool on holiday with them and make sure they know how to use it correctly.
- Advise clients to talk to a vet/SQP for advice about appropriate treatments well before they intend to travel.
- Recommend that they have their pet checked as soon as they return from a holiday abroad, especially if their pet shows any signs of sickness.

## CALL FOR ACTION IN NHS

The charity Lyme Disease Action is calling for better knowledge within the NHS of how to diagnose and treat the disease in people, writes **Carolyn Henderson**. LDA says that in the United Kingdom, Lyme disease is carried by the sheep tick *Ixodes ricinus*, the hedgehog tick *I hexagonus* and the fox or English dog tick *I canisuga*. Ticks can also feed on deer, and on

small mammals such as mice and on birds.

The sheep tick prefers long grass, woods and moorland, although it does not occur exclusively in these habitats. The other two ticks live mainly in the homes of their hosts but can be deposited wherever these animals travel.

People who live or work in the parts of the country

where the tick is prevalent are likely to be at greater risk, as are those in urban areas with overgrown gardens or with extensive parks. However, cases of the disease are widespread and it is possible that the full picture of tick distribution is not yet fully understood.

Anyone can get Lyme disease if a tick that is carrying the infection has bitten them.