

EXOTIC DISEASES: INFORMATION FOR PET OWNERS

IMPORTANT NEWS FOR OWNERS OF ANIMALS TRAVELLING ABROAD!

The bad news:

As more pets travel abroad, there has been an increasing number of animals returning to the UK with 'exotic' parasites and diseases. There is concern that some of these parasites may become endemic in the UK with potentially serious consequences for both human and animal health.

The following lists some of these infections and diseases and how pets may pick up infection:

DISEASE	SPREAD BY
Leishmaniosis	Sandflies
Dirofiariosis	Mosquitoes
Babesiosis	Ticks
Ehrlichiosis	Ticks
<i>Echinococcus multilocularis</i> tapeworm	Small rodents (if eaten)
Rabies	Bite/saliva from another infected animal

UK pet travel regulations require that animals travelling abroad are microchipped, have a valid Animal Health Certificate, are vaccinated against rabies and are treated for tapeworms 1-5 days before re-entering the UK. These rules also apply for travel from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. Rabies blood antibody testing is also required for travel to countries outside of the EU not listed on the Gov.UK website. The aim of this legislation has always been to protect human health rather than animal health and following these guidelines alone will not guarantee the health of animals travelling abroad.

The distribution of many of the above 'exotic' diseases is changing rapidly. This may be due in part to better surveillance and diagnosis, but also increased movement of pets, people and a changing climate allowing both parasites and their vectors to increase their geographical range.

The good news:

More information is now available to UK vets to help us assess the risk of disease to animals travelling abroad and we are now better able to advise pet owners on disease prevention protocols. There are a number of products available that can help reduce the risk of pet exposure to insects and ticks that spread disease, and for the control of tapeworms which can present potentially serious problems for human health should infected dogs enter the UK. However there is no single treatment that covers all the parasites. An assessment of the risks facing each pet is needed, which will depend on which countries the pet will be going to and the time of year the travel will be taking place.

If you are planning to travel abroad with your pet please contact your veterinary practice and ask for a **Travel Clinic** appointment with an OV vet (DEFRA approved Official Veterinarians). Please bring to the clinic all the documentation that you currently have for your pet and your planned itinerary.

The **travel clinic appointment should be made at least one month before your intended departure** abroad as travel will not be possible until 3 weeks and a day after the rabies injection. The period of time will be substantially longer if rabies blood testing is required. Some of the disease prevention products also need to be given well before travel. For further information on pet travel please contact your veterinary practice and visit <https://www.gov.uk/taking-your-pet-abroad>.