



# Taking your pets abroad

YOUR GUIDE TO DISEASES  
ENCOUNTERED ABROAD



**Animal Welfare Foundation**

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

AWF is the charity led by the veterinary profession

Registered Charity No. 287118

## Pet Travel Scheme

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The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) permits the movement of pet animals (dogs, cats and ferrets) to and from the UK without the need for quarantine.

Many diseases that occur abroad are not seen in the UK and several of them are transmitted by biting insects and ticks.

Pets living in the UK will not have met these diseases before travelling abroad and are likely to be highly susceptible. The travel scheme allows for the free movement of pets from country to country but it is important that this should not be undertaken without serious thought. You need to consider if your pet is likely to be affected by the stress of long-distance travel, the high temperatures in many southern European countries and the risk of exposure to diseases not encountered in the UK. 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 as they need to be imported from abroad.



## Pre-travel check

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We strongly recommend that you make an appointment with your vet for a pre-travel consultation before taking your pet abroad. This should be at least three weeks before you travel as some of the medicines used for prevention of diseases must be started before you leave the UK. This important check will involve:

- Discussing the countries you intend to travel to and what specific health risks your pet may be exposed to.
- A clinical examination of your pet to ensure it is fit to travel abroad.
- Checking that the rabies vaccination and pet passport are up to date.
- Ensuring the microchip is working and reading correctly.
- Discussing the preventative treatment needed to protect your pet against ticks, sandflies, heartworm and tapeworm whilst abroad.
- Prescribing the most effective medication for your pet and showing you how to administer it.



**This leaflet outlines some of the more common diseases encountered abroad. The advice is quite generalised and in all cases you, as pet owners, are recommended to seek advice from your own vet before travelling abroad.**

If your pet becomes ill after you return to the UK it is very important to tell your vet that you have been abroad with your pet, even if it was some time ago.

**Ensure that your pet is fully covered by pet health insurance and that you check that this cover extends to trips abroad.**

## Babesiosis

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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 animal 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.

► **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 a carrier 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 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

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This is a relatively widespread disease of dogs (less commonly cats) 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.

### Tick control:

- Avoid known tick-affected habitats such as wooded areas and places where there is livestock
- Spot-on medication, impregnated collars and specific sprays are available from your vet—always use these according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Start treatment before travelling and continue when abroad. At the pre-travel check your vet will advise you on the most suitable preventative treatment and how to apply it correctly.
- Be sure to check your dog daily for ticks and remove any that you see by using a proper tick-removal device that you can obtain from your vet
- Consult your vet if signs of illness appear, always making it clear if your dog has been abroad.



## Leishmaniasis

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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.

### Prevention of leishmaniasis:

- Avoid 'high-risk' areas; leave your dog at home or boarding kennels 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 and will be discussed at your pre-travel check.
- Start treatment at least three weeks before travelling and continue when abroad. Always use according to manufacturer's recommendations. Repellents alone cannot completely protect all pets from sandflies.
- A vaccine is available and should be given before travelling as it takes some time for immunity to develop
- Consult your vet if symptoms appear, even if this happens months or years after your dog has visited a country where this disease occurs.



### Heartworm

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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 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.

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

▶ **Diagnosis can be confirmed by a blood test.**

#### **Prevention of heartworm:**

- Avoid mosquito-infested areas.
- Ask your vet about preventative treatment at the pre-travel check. 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.



## Canine brucellosis

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This infectious disease causes late miscarriage and stillbirth in pregnant bitches and sperm abnormalities in dogs, leading to poor fertility. It is found in the USA, Canada, South America, Asia, Africa and more recently in Eastern Europe.

Infection occurs on contact with infected birth materials or vaginal discharge after a miscarriage or stillbirth. To prevent infection isolate any bitch that has a miscarriage or stillbirth and thoroughly clean and disinfect the birthing area. If you suspect that a bitch or dog may be infected it should be taken to your vet. Treatment involves long term antibiotics, but this is not always successful.

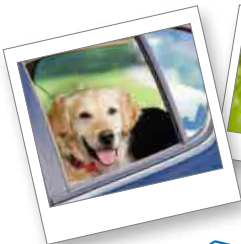
- **Diagnosis** can be confirmed by a blood test. Human infection is possible but very rare; only 30 cases of human infection have been reported worldwide in the last 50 years.

## Rabies

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Rabies is a disease caused by a virus that affects most mammals, including humans. It is usually caught from a bite from an infected animal. The disease targets the nervous system and once symptoms occur it is almost always fatal.

The UK has officially been rabies-free since 1922. The Pet Travel Scheme insists on compulsory rabies vaccination to help ensure that the UK remains free and also that animals are protected.



### Tapeworm

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The tapeworm *Echinococcus multilocularis* can easily infect dogs whilst abroad and although the adult parasite produces no clinical signs in dogs, it can cause a potentially fatal condition in humans (*alveolar echinococcosis*). This particular tapeworm 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.



## What you need to do before travelling

### For pets travelling to and from other EU Member States and approved non-EU countries\* they must:

- Be positively identified by means of a microchip
- Have an up-to-date vaccination against rabies
- From 29.12.14 be issued with a new numbered EU pet passport by your vet (old-style passports will remain valid)
- Wait 21 days after rabies vaccination before travelling
- Travel into the UK on an approved route
- Dogs must be treated by a vet for tapeworm between 24 and 120 hours (one to five days) before arrival into the UK and the pet passport signed accordingly. No treatment is required for dogs entering from Finland, Ireland or Malta.

### For pets entering the UK from non-approved countries\* they must:

- Be positively identified by means of a microchip
- Have an up to date vaccination against rabies
- Pass a rabies blood test taken at least 30 days after vaccination
- Be issued with an EU Pet Passport or Official Veterinary Health Certificate†
- Wait three months after the date the blood sample was taken
- Travel into the UK on an approved route
- Dogs must be treated by a vet for tapeworm between 24 and 120 hours (one to five days) before their scheduled arrival time into the UK and the Pet Passport or Official Certificate signed accordingly.

\*For a list of countries refer to:

[www.gov.uk/pet-travel-information-for-pet-owners#countries-and-territories](http://www.gov.uk/pet-travel-information-for-pet-owners#countries-and-territories)

†For animals travelling from a non-EU listed country, the vet will issue an official third country veterinary certificate.



### For pets entering the UK from the Republic of Ireland:

All pets should be microchipped, vaccinated against rabies and accompanied by a pet passport.

As both the Republic of Ireland and the UK have had no indigenous rabies for many decades, compliance checks for animals travelling between the two countries will not be applied. However, it is important that the rules are followed to ensure trouble-free travelling between the countries.

### Further information on pet travel

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- Pet Travel Scheme helpline:  
+44 (0)370 241 1710  
(Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm)
- Email: [pettravel@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pettravel@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk)
- GOV.UK website:  
[www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview](http://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview)

#### Animal Welfare Foundation

AWF is the charity led by the veterinary profession. We are committed to improving the welfare of all animals through veterinary science, education and debate.

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You can download the AWF's other leaflets and resources from our website or you can request copies by contacting us:

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