



Reducing the risk of infectious and parasitic disease risks in pets

During the COVID-19 pandemic, routine pet vaccination has been temporarily suspended at veterinary practices. In normal circumstances, the best protection for pets is to keep vaccination up to date. The duration of protection will vary depending on the individual animal and the vaccine concerned; therefore the best advice is to take measures which reduce the risk of your pet being exposed to infection until vaccination can be re-started. The following advice should help you keep your pets safe during these unprecedented times.

Dog Owners

Many diseases can be spread direct from dog to dog (e.g. so-called “kennel cough”) so it is important to practice ‘social distancing’ for your dog:

- Avoid close contact between your dog & other dogs
- Keep your dog on a short lead when other dogs are about to avoid contact
- Avoid walking dogs in areas and at times where there are a lot of other dogs
- Avoid your dog drinking from common water bowls & sharing toys with other dogs
- Avoid petting other people’s dogs and cats during this time

Some diseases (e.g. leptospirosis or parvovirus) can be picked up from wildlife or the environment so avoid exercising pets in high risk areas and prevent high risk activities:

- Avoid your dog accessing ditches, ponds, lakes & rivers or drinking from any of these water sources or puddles
- Avoid your dog coming into contact with wildlife (especially rodents) or scavenging
- Avoid free access to or exercising your dog in farmyards, in the vicinity of stables, poultry flocks or anywhere else where rodents are likely to be present in increased numbers
- Avoid allowing your dog access to sniff at other dog’s faeces
- Pick up your dog’s faeces whilst on a walk and dispose hygienically

Some diseases are spread by external parasites e.g. Babesiosis or Lyme disease (ticks), so reducing the risk of your dog being bitten by these insects is important if you are in a risk area:

- Avoid exercising your dog in tick habitats such as areas of forestry and parkland where there are abundant deer and/or use veterinary recommended parasite control that is effective against both fleas and ticks.
- It is important to keep up your pet’s worm control based on their lifestyle and risk factors
- Note that vets are now permitted to prescribe these preventative parasite control products remotely

If you have any concerns regarding your dog’s health, please ring your veterinary practice. They will provide you with advice and guidance on how to manage concerns during this time.

Cat Owners

Since many diseases can be spread direct from cat to cat (e.g. feline 'flu, feline leukaemia) it is important to try to minimise contact with other cats – especially where there may be stray cats in the area:

- Keep cats indoors where possible (provided this doesn't cause excessive stress to your cat), if not then limit their time outdoors to during the day and try to bring them in overnight when cats are typically more active, to reduce the risk of cats fighting
- Maintain effective control against fleas and ticks to minimise risks from these parasites
- Avoid petting cats and dogs that do not belong to you to avoid passing on diseases to them from your hands

If you have any concerns regarding your cat's health, please ring your veterinary practice. They will provide you with advice and guidance on how to manage concerns during this time.

Rabbit Owners

The two vaccine-preventable diseases of rabbits (myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD)) are both present within the wild rabbit population and, although they can be spread by close contact, they can also be spread by biting insects such as fleas and mosquitoes:

- Bring rabbits indoors, if possible, but if not then house them away from any possible contact with wild rabbits and in insect-proof housing (e.g. with insect screens or fine netting across the openings)
- Regularly use a veterinary-approved flea product for rabbits (be sure to use products labelled for rabbits, as some flea products can be toxic to them)
- Consider the use of fly repellents and other control measures outside the rabbits housing
- Maintain excellent cage hygiene
- Feed mainly good quality grass or hay as the main food, minimise obesity and gastrointestinal problems by feeding only a limited quantity of a complete pelleted food, avoiding or minimising treat items such as carrots, which contain a lot of sugar
- Check your rabbit's behaviour and physical condition twice a day during the warmer months to make sure soiling does not occur around your rabbit's hindquarters
- Consider the use of an appropriate product to prevent fly-strike if rabbits are housed outdoors

If you have any concerns regarding your rabbit's health, please ring your veterinary practice. They will provide you with advice and guidance on how to manage concerns during this time.