

Spring tick alert!

As the weather warms up and we head towards the Spring and Summer months, ticks become more active, posing a risk to both pets and their owners.



Ticks can be found in long grasses and wooded areas, especially where there is wildlife such as deer and hedgehogs. Here, they wait for a human or animal to brush past them, so that they can jump on and feed. They attach using their mouthparts and will feed on blood from their host for several days before dropping off.

Although pets rarely seem troubled by them, ticks can spread diseases that pose serious health risks:

Lyme disease is the most well known disease spread by ticks. Affected pets (and also humans) can develop swollen joints and stiffness. They can also develop a fever, anorexia and lethargy.

Babesiosis is an emerging tick-borne disease, destroying red blood cells and causing acute signs of anaemia in affected dogs (but not humans). It is mainly found in mainland Europe, but there is a risk of spread into the UK and Ireland.

What about prevention? Current evidence suggests that tick-borne diseases take many hours after tick attachment to be transmitted.

Veterinary prescription medications for the prevention of ticks often kill these pesky parasites quicker than their non-prescription counterparts, which is very important in the prevention of tick borne diseases and they are available as spot-ons, tablets or collars.

We are here to help, so please get in touch for further information!



Vaccinations: In the early weeks of life, puppies and kittens gain immunity against disease from their mother's milk. This fades over time and they will need a course of vaccines to ensure they are protected against infectious diseases (see box right).



Worming: It is very important to treat puppies and kittens for roundworms (see photo left) since they can acquire these from their mothers early in life. As they grow up, they are susceptible to infection with both roundworms and tapeworms and will require regular worming treatment. Additionally, lungworm is a problem for many dogs (see overleaf for further information).

Fleas: Puppies and kittens often arrive complete with a small army of fleas, so it is a good idea for us to give them a check over on arrival! We can recommend the most appropriate treatment for your pet, whilst household sprays are great for treating your home.

Pet insurance is also highly recommended, giving you *peace of mind* should unplanned for veterinary treatment be required.

We can also advise you on other topics such as **diets and feeding**, **dental care** (see box right), and much more! We are here to help, so please ask a member of our team for further information on any aspect of caring for your new arrival!



Looking after your new pet

Annual Vaccinations

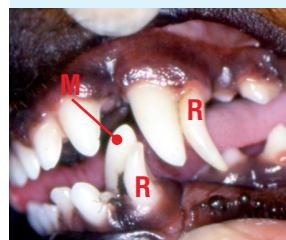
We recommend you regularly vaccinate your pets against the following, potentially fatal, infectious diseases:

Dogs are routinely vaccinated against: parvovirus, leptospirosis, hepatitis and distemper.

Cats are usually vaccinated against cat flu, panleukopenia, and feline leukemia virus.

Early Dental Care

Pets have two sets of teeth, and their "milk" teeth progressively fall out from about 12 weeks of age to make way for their adult teeth. If this doesn't happen the corresponding adult tooth may erupt in the *wrong* direction. This is usually only a problem in **dogs** and is treated by extracting the retained teeth.



R = retained "milk" canine teeth
M = mal-aligned adult canine tooth

Kitten photo: Warren Photographic

Covid-19 and early socialisation



The early experiences a puppy or kitten has of people and their surroundings has a huge impact on their behaviour and personality for the rest of their life. When considering a new pet, it's really important to make sure the breeder or rescue centre has fully socialised them – it could save you a lot of problems in the future.

Unfortunately the current Covid pandemic has made it much harder to socialise young pets, but it is important breeders and owners do what they can within the current rules to give young pets the best chance of becoming well-adjusted adults. It is vital puppies and kittens stay with the litter and mother until at least eight weeks old, to learn good dog or cat manners and behaviour. After their first few weeks, the aim should be for puppies and kittens to have regular contact with all kinds of people – adults, children and the elderly. They should ideally be reared in a home environment, so they get used to the sights, sounds and smells of family life. Once puppies are fully vaccinated it's a good idea to get them out and about – introducing them to a range of sounds and experiences, in a controlled and gradual manner. As mentioned above – the current Covid pandemic has made all this much harder, however as restrictions hopefully ease, this should get easier. Please get in touch for further information on socialising your young pet.





Ticker trouble!

Did you know that the heart is a muscular pump responsible for supplying the tissues of your pet's body with oxygen and nutrients – just as in ourselves.

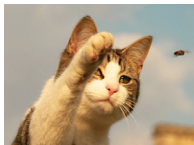
The key function of the heart is to pump deoxygenated blood to the lungs where it is reoxygenated, and pump reoxygenated blood back round to the tissues of the body – allowing pets to lead an active life. Whilst most of our pets take all this for granted, heart disease is nevertheless surprisingly common.

Younger dogs: Some pets are born with heart defects. These can include: valve malformations, small holes within the walls dividing the heart chambers, and abnormalities in the vessels leaving the heart. These defects can cause turbulence to blood flow through the heart and vessels, usually detected as a heart murmur on examination.

Older dogs: Additionally, some pets will develop heart conditions later in life. The most common condition affecting smaller dogs is a degenerative disease of one of the heart valves, resulting in blood flowing *backwards* through the left hand side of the heart, usually causing a heart murmur. Larger dogs can suffer from valve disease, but are also predisposed to a condition where the heart dilates and is no longer able to pump blood as effectively. Affected dogs may or may not have a heart murmur. Other problems include irregular heart rhythms (such as atrial fibrillation) which can also be debilitating.

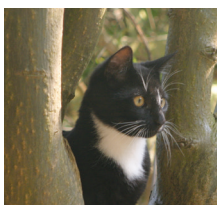
In dogs, signs of heart disease (which can be gradual or sudden in onset) include:

- reluctance to exercise
 - tiring more easily
 - laboured breathing
 - pale or blueish gums
 - fainting or collapse.
- Coughing can also be associated with heart disease.



Cats are prone to developing a condition where the heart muscle excessively enlarges and results in a poorly functioning heart. Older cats are at an increased risk. Signs of heart disease include reluctance to exercise, weakness or collapse and laboured or rapid breathing.

If you are concerned that your pet is showing any signs of heart disease, please come and see us for a check-up. As with many illnesses, early detection is the *golden rule!* The good news is that novel medications can delay the onset of heart failure or help manage the signs, thus improving length and quality of life for your pet. If you have any questions regarding your pet's heart health, please contact us at the surgery.



Chips with everything!

Having your pets microchipped is absolutely vital! Even the most loyal of dogs and the most indoor of cats can go missing. Rabbits can hop off, tortoises can make a slow getaway, and ferrets will find the smallest of holes!

As you are hopefully aware, it is now compulsory to microchip dogs. Plus, when we are able to travel abroad again (Covid permitting), don't forget that all travelling pets will require a microchip to effectively identify them as part of their travel documents.

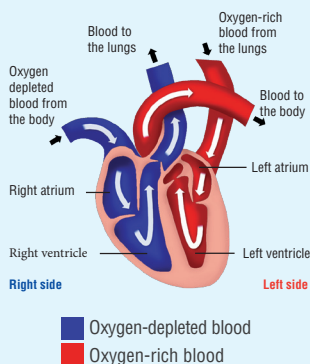
So how are microchips implanted? A microchip is hardly bigger than a grain of rice and just takes a few seconds to implant. Like a normal injection, it is inserted under the skin at the back of the neck, and once there, lasts a lifetime.

Should your pet go missing and is found, veterinary practices, the police and welfare organisations all have special microchip scanners and will routinely scan stray pets looking for a microchip. So – don't take any chances – get your pets microchipped today, and give your pets the best chance of being reunited with you.

How the heart pumps

In a healthy heart, the right side of the heart receives deoxygenated blood from the tissues of the body. As the chambers of the right side contract, they pump the blood to the lungs where the blood is reoxygenated. The oxygen rich blood then flows back into the left side of the heart. As the chambers of the left side contract, the blood is then pumped to the tissues of the body. This is illustrated below.

As the heart muscle squeezes and pumps, valves within the heart prevent back flow of blood.



Lungworm awareness!

The warmer Spring weather provides the perfect opportunity for Lungworm to spread ever more widely throughout the UK and Ireland. Lungworm (or *Angiostrongylus Vasorum*), is a parasite affecting dogs and foxes. It can cause significant disease and in some cases, be fatal. It is therefore very important to be aware of lungworm and how you can help protect your pet from this parasite.



Dogs can be infected with lungworm larvae carried by **slugs and snails** (which act as intermediate hosts). Slugs and snails can be inadvertently eaten in grass,

soil or whilst playing with toys in the garden. Lungworm larvae can even be found in the trail that snails leave behind in your garden. The disease is commonest in young dogs that eat or play with slugs and snails, and in dogs that eat or drink outside and may have had slugs or snails in their bowls.



Electron micrograph of an adult lungworm

Lungworm are swallowed as tiny larvae, which migrate into the circulation and travel to the right side of the heart. Here they develop into adult worms (see electron micrograph) which can build up in the heart. Here the adults mate and produce eggs. The eggs hatch into larvae and then migrate into the lung tissue. These larvae are coughed up and are passed out into your dog's faeces to re-infect molluscs. When in the body the larvae cause significant lung tissue damage, often causing a cough, breathing troubles and lethargy. This can result in bronchitis, heart failure and spontaneous bleeding. Affected dogs often become weak and lethargic, go off their food, and may cough, vomit, or pass blood. The disease can be so severe as to be fatal but, if diagnosed early, can be treated successfully.

The good news is that prevention is straightforward with spot-on or tablet medications, both of which are highly effective.

If you are concerned about lungworm, please have a chat to our staff who will be able to advise you on the best form of preventative treatment to protect your pets.