

SUMMER 2015

Just the jab!

With regular outbreaks of infectious diseases, the importance of routine vaccinations in dogs and cats can't be over-emphasised. After initial courses of injections for puppies and kittens, dogs and cats need regular booster vaccinations to maintain their immunity.

Cats are generally vaccinated against Cat Flu and Enteritis (diarrhoea) and the Feline Leukaemia Virus (which can cause cancer and weaken the immune system), all of which can otherwise be fatal.



Dogs can be protected against Parvovirus which causes bloody diarrhoea, as well as Leptospirosis, Hepatitis, and Distemper virus which can cause liver, kidney and neurological disease. All of these are potentially fatal. Protection against *Bordetella* (also known as Kennel Cough) is also often advisable – see lower right article. Other vaccines can be given in specific circumstances – for instance rabies vaccination is needed for pets travelling abroad with the Pet Travel Scheme.



Leptospirosis has been in the news recently and is a bacterial disease affecting many animal species, including dogs and occasionally humans. Carried by rats and other rodents, it survives in damp environments including still or slow moving water. Dogs who enjoy swimming or playing in ponds and ditches are at particular risk.



Finally – the title to this article is a little misleading in that your booster visit is *so much more* than “just a jab”! We will also give your pet a complete health check – allowing us to flag up any health issues before they become too much of a problem. Contact us for an appointment!



The trouble with ticks!

With the onset of warmer weather, something to be on the lookout for when grooming or stroking your pets is ticks! Ticks are generally found in areas of woodland, heathland and grassland, waiting for an animal or human 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 finally dropping off.

Ticks can cause problems in two main ways:

- **Local tissue reactions:** Firstly they can sometimes cause a marked tissue reaction at the attachment site.
- **Tick borne diseases:** Secondly, and more importantly, ticks can carry infectious diseases which may be transmitted to pets and humans. The most common one is **Lyme Disease**, caused by the tick borne pathogen – *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Although Lyme disease has been reported in a wide variety of mammals, dogs and people are more susceptible to the disease.

So how can you minimise the risk of Lyme disease in your pets?

- Daily monitoring for ticks and careful removal of ticks with a tick hook within 24 hours of attachment. This approach works because a tick infected with *Borrelia* has to feed for several hours and often 24-48 hours before disease transmission occurs.
- Chemical tick protection – there are a range of products that rapidly kill or repel ticks and which are very important in reducing tick feeding and therefore Lyme disease exposure. Spot-on, collar and tablet products are all available, offering you a wide variety of effective options for your pets.

In addition to Lyme disease, pets travelling to continental Europe also risk exposure to other tick borne diseases such as Ehrlichiosis and Babesiosis – both very serious infectious diseases and a key reason to adopt the tick control measures listed above.



Attached ticks with buried mouthparts are often found whilst grooming your pets



Tick removal: do's and don't's

✓ A simple twisting and pulling action is all that is required to remove the tick while minimising disease risk. Specially designed v-shaped tick removers that remove ticks by rotation are very effective at removing ticks



Close up of removed tick complete with mouthparts

✗ Stress placed on the tick by burning, freezing, covering with Vaseline and physical squeezing will lead to regurgitation of the tick's stomach contents resulting in an increased risk of disease transmission

✗ Similarly, detachment of the head, leaving it in situ will also lead to increased risk of disease transmission

Kennel Cough – is your dog vaccinated?



Kennel cough is a highly contagious infection of the upper respiratory tract of dogs and in fact, unlike its name, can be caught anywhere that dogs meet – out on walks, training classes, dog shows, and of course boarding kennels.

Dogs of all ages can be affected and signs include a harsh, dry, whooping-type cough. Whilst some dogs recover relatively rapidly, others may cough for weeks and some may get more serious complications such as pneumonia.

Prevention is much better than cure, because without vaccination, treatment of kennel cough can be a costly and lengthy process involving isolation and antibiotic therapy. Kennel cough is caused by a mixture of viruses and a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. We strongly recommend that dogs are vaccinated before staying in a boarding kennels and at other times when the disease is rife. Please contact us for more information or to book your booster.



At last, the prospect of warm lazy days and balmy barbecue weather! But as the weather warms up, do take the time to make sure your pets stay safe. Here we look at a few steps you can take to keep them fit and well.

Heat can be a real killer for many pets and for this reason it's a good idea to walk dogs in the morning or evening – before 8am and after 5pm.



If you have space, dogs love cooling down in a paddling pool. Frozen ice treats (photo left) are also a good way of cooling your dog down on a hot day.

Rabbits and guinea pigs are very susceptible to problems arising from excess heat, because – unlike dogs, if they overheat, they cannot pant effectively or sweat to cool themselves down. It is vitally important that they have access to shade at all times, plus cool water – preferably in a bowl (not a bottle).

Factor 50! Cats are natural sunbathers and for many cats this causes no problems. However cats with white ear tips and noses are prone to sunburn and this can lead to cancerous changes over time. High factor sun block applied to the at-risk areas helps to minimise this risk. Call us if you are worried.



Ear tip of a cat with early (reddened) cancerous changes. If your pet is showing signs of skin changes, please call us at once



A grass seed has become lodged between the toes in a dog causing an interdigital cyst

Grass awns of the meadow grasses are an issue at this time of year. They are commonly trapped in dogs' ears (see article right), and may also become embedded in the feet (see photo left) or other areas. In view of this, thorough inspection of the coat is advisable following walks.

Flies are another summer hazard. Flies are very attracted to rabbits if they have soiled bottoms – here they lay their eggs which rapidly hatch out into flesh eating maggots. It is important to check bunnies' bottoms on a daily basis and call us at once if you are worried.

Finally, please remember that the temperature in cars can rise rapidly and death from heat stroke can follow in minutes, so **pets should NEVER be left unattended in cars.**

Guinea pig care!

Guinea pigs, originally from the grasslands of South America, are sociable animals that make great family pets. They thrive on a mixture of hay, fresh greenstuff, fruit and vegetables and can be given small amounts of commercial concentrate. Relatively trouble free, they require no annual vaccinations but we do recommend regular health checks so their teeth and nails can be monitored. Problems to look out for include chest infections (that can follow bad weather or stress), diarrhoea (which can relate to infections or a diet change), skin disease and dental problems (usually associated with overgrown teeth).

If you would like any further information on any aspect of guinea pig care, or if you would like a check-up for your pet, please contact us!



Skin problems may occasionally occur and the most common of these is an infestation with a burrowing mite –



Trixacarus caviae. Affected guinea pigs are itchy and develop scaly skin, which is

often most obvious on the ear tips initially. If untreated, areas of hair loss, self inflicted wounds and skin infections can develop.

Guinea pig: Warren Photographic

Fact file: Ear disease



Does your pet show signs of head shaking and ear scratching? These are commonly seen in dogs and cats and, combined with other symptoms such as ear redness and discharge – point to ear disease as a problem.

The ear is protected externally by a pinna (or flap). A narrow ear canal carries sound to the ear drum where it passes onto the middle and inner ear.

Unlike the situation in humans where middle ear disease is common, most of the problems seen in pets occur in the *external* ear canal – with an often very painful condition called otitis externa.

The key to diagnosing and treating otitis externa is to identify the *underlying* cause. These include:

- **Ear mite infestations** with *Otodectes cynotis* is commonly seen in puppies and kittens and are typically associated with a crusty brown discharge (see photo right). The mites can be identified under the microscope (see inset photo).
- **Foreign bodies** such as grass awns (see panel left) are a common problem in pets and typically present with sudden onset severe head shaking.
- **Allergic dermatitis:** since the ear canal is lined with skin, it can be affected by *localised* allergic skin disease affecting the skin lining the external ear canal. This is often seen as part of a more generalised allergic skin condition, typically involving foot chewing and face rubbing.

In order to effectively treat otitis externa it is very important to identify the underlying cause. Some, such as ear mites or foreign bodies are easily identified and treated. However, over time, the underlying cause is commonly obscured and made worse by *secondary* opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections. So – if your pet is showing signs of ear disease, such as head shaking, ear rubbing or just having a smelly ear, it is very important that we examine them and establish the *underlying* cause of the problem as soon as we can, since this will give us the best chance of a successful long term outcome. Call us today for an appointment!

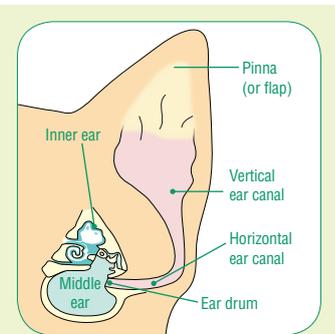
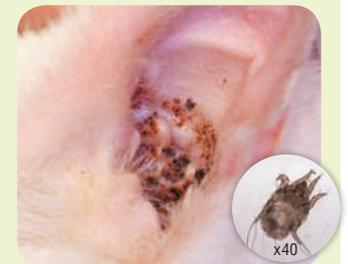


Diagram of the ear. Most problems occur in the vertical and horizontal ear canals



Opening to the vertical ear canal in a cat with a crusty brown discharge typical of **ear mites** *Otodectes cynotis* (inset)



Opening to the vertical ear canal in a dog showing redness and itchiness typical of **allergic skin disease**