



042 Overseas travel: risks and requirements for pet owners

To travel abroad with your pet, you will need to obtain either an Animal Health Certificate or an Export Health Certificate from your vet, depending on where and why you are travelling. These certificates are primarily aimed at preventing the infectious diseases that pose a threat to human health entering the UK, rather than protecting the health of your pet, so it is important for you to consider what can be done to keep them safe.

Parasites, such as fleas, ticks, roundworms, tapeworms and mites are organisms that live on or in other creatures. They are found throughout the world, but different types live in different climates and carry different risks.

Similarly, some biting flies and insects only survive in warmer climates but can carry diseases which may harm us and our pets. So, where you travel to will affect the dangers you and your pet are exposed to.

The European Scientific Counsel for Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP) provides useful advice to travellers to destinations within Europe here: [Travelling Pets | ESCCAP](#)

Wherever you travel, use effective anti-parasite treatments, check your pet regularly for parasites, avoid contact with other dogs, particularly strays, and always carry a tick-removing tool with you. This video demonstrates how to use them: [O'Tom Tick Twister® - YouTube](#)

What diseases should we be concerned about, for us and our pets, in Europe?

Distemper, Parvovirus, Leptospirosis

Vaccinations against these three diseases are part of the core vaccinations dogs receive in the UK. These diseases are present in Europe too and may be even more common due to lower vaccination rates and higher numbers of stray animals. Keeping your dog's vaccinations up to date will help to minimise the risks from these diseases whilst you are abroad, as well as at home.

Rabies

Since the UK is rabies free, your pet will need to be vaccinated against rabies to travel to any country where it is found and be allowed back home. Rabies vaccinations can last up to 3 years, but if your dog or cat has not been vaccinated against rabies before, or their vaccination has lapsed, a travel health certificate can only be completed more than 3 weeks after the injection, so make sure you contact the vet well in advance of your planned trip.

Leishmaniasis

This disease is usually caught from biting flies mainly in the Southern Mediterranean countries, but it is spreading northwards, aided by increasing temperatures.

Many UK vet practices have now seen dogs who have travelled from the Mediterranean with this debilitating and life shortening disease. Dogs are considered the main host of the infection, but it can affect many other mammals, including cats and humans.

Unfortunately, there is no cure, and the disease can be fatal. The parasite causes many signs including skin changes, weight loss and nose bleeds, and can lead to kidney failure. It can be very expensive to manage as it requires lifelong medication that needs importing from Spain and continuous, regular monitoring with blood and urine tests.

To reduce the risk of infection, avoid areas where sandflies are known to be present. If you do visit one of these areas, avoid dawn and dusk walks when they are most active. Fly repellents are available which help but are not 100% effective.

Our team can advise of the best repellent that can repel flies to prevent feeding for 2-3 weeks, and medicated collars which help protect against biting flies for 5-6 months. Household sprays can be useful and mosquito nets are also recommended to try and prevent flies in accommodation.

A vaccination against Leishmaniasis is also available and should be given at least 4 weeks before travelling. Dogs must be over 6 months old to receive the vaccine, and protection lasts for 1 year. Please speak to your vet if you are interested.

The combination of fly repellents and vaccination is believed to give the best protection.

Tick Borne diseases (*Ehrlichiosis*, *Babesiosis*)

These are a group of diseases, present throughout mainland Europe, that are caused by parasites that ticks can pass to your dog. They can cause long term lethargy, fever and in some cases fatal, spontaneous bleeding.

We recommend effective tick treatment to reduce the risk of these diseases, such as a repellent collar (lasting 5-6 months), a prescription medicine spot on (lasting 4 weeks), or an oral tablet or chew and in some forms spot on that can last between 1 and 3 months depending on the product. Ask in the practice about how we can prescribe and supply these for your pet.

Heartworm (*Dirofilariasis*)

This parasitic worm is found in Southern Europe but is now spreading to central and north-eastern European countries by movement of infected animals.

Despite its name, it primarily causes disease in the animal's lungs, only spreading to the heart in the later stages, when it can become fatal. It causes breathing difficulties, coughing and reduced ability to exercise.

The disease is spread by mosquitoes, so protection is largely focussed on using effective fly repellents, as above, mosquito nets and household sprays.

Using mosquito repellents and monthly treatment with moxidectin found in a variety of prescription medicines provides the best protection speak to your team about what would be best for your pet and your destination.

Echinococcus

Echinococcus species are zoonotic tapeworms that can cause disease in humans, with *E. multilocularis* having the potential to be fatal if untreated. *E. multilocularis* is endemic in a wide area of central and eastern Europe. The UK is *Echinococcus multilocularis* free but *E. granulosus* is found in Wales.

Risk factors for Echinococcus include hunting and eating small prey and being fed on undercooked or raw meat, which is often sourced from poorly screened non uk meat, as well as travel to areas where there is infection in wildlife.

Cats and dogs can both be hosts and therefore should be treated with praziquantel containing wormers at least every 4 weeks when at risk of infection and prior to re-entry to the UK.

Brucellosis

This is a bacterial disease, with strains that affect farm animals (*Brucella suis*, *B. melitensis* and *B. abortus*) and dogs (*B. canis*). It is found in Africa, Asia and America and is now extending to Europe, particularly around the Mediterranean. Brucellosis can be passed on to humans, though the risk from *Brucella canis* is believed to be relatively low. The UK is officially brucella free, and confirmed cases of Brucellosis must be reported by the testing laboratory to the government (APHA), but the popularity of imported rescue dogs and dogs travelling for mating is likely to have contributed to the more frequent detection of cases here.

The disease can be passed on to your dog by direct contact with infected dogs, particularly mating, but the bacteria can be found in all body fluids including urine and saliva. Symptoms include reproductive disorders and painful joint and spinal diseases. There is no cure, and infected dogs must be isolated for the rest of their lives, meaning they are often euthanased on welfare grounds.

To avoid your dog contracting Brucellosis, avoid contact with other dogs whilst abroad. If you are travelling to mate your dog, pre-breeding tests are recommended, though these are not 100% accurate.

How to protect your pet

Before you travel:

- ✓ Make sure your pet's routine and rabies vaccinations are up to date.
- ✓ Check out the requirements of the country/countries you are travelling to on their websites
- ✓ Speak to your vet about travel requirements at least a couple of months in advance of the date you travel
- ✓ Ask your vet about what effective fly repellents, wormers and tick protection are recommended for the duration of your trip.
- ✓ Pack an emergency first aid kit, including tick removing tools.
- ✓ Take mosquito nets and reliable environmental sprays to use in your accommodation.
- ✓ Check out the area you are travelling to on the ESCCAP website for more detailed, regional advice: <https://www.esccap.org/travelling-pets-advice/>
- ✓ Ensure you know which vets are local to where you are staying in case you need help or treatments during your travels. You will also need a local vet (either at the resort, border or port) to administer a wormer to your pet prior to returning home.

Whilst you're there:

- ✗ Avoid walking your pet at dusk or dawn if you are travelling in southern Europe.
- ✗ Avoid walking your pet in 'tick hotspots' such as wooded areas, grassland or areas covered with leaf litter.
- ✗ Avoid other animals, especially strays, whilst out walking your pets.

Please be aware:

- Not all treatments are available on our Pet Health Plan, but a discount is often available so please discuss your requirements with your practice team.
- No treatments or preventative measures are 100% effective at preventing the spread of disease.

This document was amended on 24/07/2023 by the regulatory team based on our understanding of the diseases listed and treatments that help with prevention and with help from the Parker & Crowther team for providing a template for this document. If you have any queries relating to this document, please contact regulatoryadvise@vetpartners.co.uk