

HOLMER VETERINARY SURGERY



Welcome to our Summer 2020 Newsletter

Over the last couple of months all our lives have been dramatically altered due to the unescapable Covid 19 crisis. No one could have imagined how catastrophic the coronavirus would be, the thousands of lives lost is devastating and we all fear for the health of our loved ones. Each of us does all we can to play our part in getting through this crisis. For our team at Holmer Vets it has meant reducing our staff numbers to be able to maintain necessary social distancing, so as to help protect staff and clients. We have done all we can to continue to offer the highest level of care we can, whilst working within the guidance of our veterinary governing bodies. As the weeks have progressed we have worked to adjust the service we provide, to try and further meet the needs of our clients pets. We will do all we can to keep you updated about changes as they occur, please look for updated posts on our website. As always, if you have any concerns about your animals health or welfare please do not hesitate to contact us. If you have concerns about your pet relating to Covid 19 we also recommend you look at the [**British Veterinary Association \(BVA\)**](#) website.

For this spring newsletter we thought that, with the surge of ticks evident, for our first article it would be a good time to take a look at tick born diseases. The month of May is 'feline hypertension awareness month' so our second article is about this very common condition of older cats, which can be easily overlooked. We had hope to be able to offer free introductory blood pressure tests, to at risk cats, this month but with the lockdown this is obviously not possible, so we will look to put an offer in place when 'normal practice' has resumed. As always we hope you find our articles interesting and informative. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to discuss your individual animals needs in relation to either topic discussed, or would like to suggest a topic you would like to see in future newsletters.

Tick-borne Diseases:

Ticks can carry and transmit a wide range of pathogens that can cause serious disease in pets and in people. Tick-borne disease represents an ongoing and growing risk to UK pets and their owners, this comes from increasing numbers of endemic ticks (that are already present in the UK), and from exotic encountered by a dog whilst travelling overseas, including mainland Europe, or ticks entering the country on imported or travelled dogs. In this article we will take a look at the tick borne diseases to which UK dogs are at risk. A future article will cover additional tick borne diseases to consider in imported and travelling pets.



Lyme's disease:

The most common tick-borne pathogen to UK pets is *Borrelia burgdorferi* the cause of Lyme's disease. Lyme disease has zoonotic potential, meaning humans can also be infected and suffer the disease.

Dogs and humans across the country are at risk of exposure/infection via bites from infected ticks of the *Ixodes* spp, including *Ixodes ricinus* and *Ixodes hexagonus*. These ticks are active from early spring to late autumn.

It is important to note that dogs infected with *Borrelia* pose no risk to owners, and there is no evidence to suggest that dog owners are more at risk of Lyme's than people without dogs. However, as dogs and their owners will be accessing the same areas, if a dog becomes infected it would suggest the owner is at higher risk due to possible exposure to infected ticks.

Most infections in dogs are sub-clinical (no symptoms) with 5-10% going on to develop clinical signs. When Lyme's disease does develop this is often due to re-exposure to infection with an incubation period of 2-5 months (the time lapse from infection/exposure before clinical symptoms develop). Dogs with symptoms of Lyme's disease often present with lameness and swollen joints, other signs can include fever, anorexia, lethargy and lymphadenopathy (enlarged lymph nodes/glands). Lyme disease is rarely recognised in cats. If you are worried your pet has been bitten by a tick and possibly showing any of the symptoms listed above please phone the surgery for advice.

If you would like information/advice regarding Lyme's disease in humans please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease/> or phone your GP.



Babesiosis:

Dermacentor reticulatus ticks are the main spreaders of *Babesia canis*, which can cause a potentially fatal haemolytic anaemia and thrombocytopenia (low platelets) in dogs.

Field surveys show that in the UK there are 4 main areas where *D.reticulatus* can be found which are: Western Wales, North Devon, South Devon and Essex. The ticks preferred habitat is sand dunes in the UK which differs from the meadow and pastureland where they more commonly inhabit in Europe. The Essex population is, so far, unique in the UK, in that it is not coastal nor in the proximity of sand dunes.

If a dog becomes infected, the severity of the disease will vary depending upon the individual's immune status/response. Dogs can present with a variety of symptoms including: lethargy, pale gums, jaundice, swollen lymph nodes, anorexia, fever and weight loss. If you are worried your dog has visited one of the areas mentioned above, been bitten by a tick and or showing any of the signs listed please phone the surgery for advice.

Preventative Tick Treatments:

To reduce the potential risk of tick-borne disease it is advised to use prophylactic compounds that rapidly kill or repel ticks. As this will reduce tick feeding and therefore reduce the risk of transmission of disease. The products we routinely stock are:

- Bravecto – tablet (dogs) spot-on (cats), protective for 3 months, immediate and persistent flea and tick killing action.
- Seresto – collar (dogs and cats), protective for 7-8 months, persistent flea and tick killing action, also has repellent action against some tick species (*Ixodes ricinus*)
- Frontline plus – spot on (dogs and cats), lasts up to 4 weeks in dogs, lasts up to 2 weeks in cats, has tick killing action.

This is not an exhaustive list of all possible treatments, and where appropriate we may recommend other products based on the individual pets need. It is also important to note that no product is 100% effective and therefore it is important to check your pet regularly for ticks at least every 24 hours if possible.

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Risk of disease:

Some pets will be at considerably higher risk of exposure to ticks based on lifestyle, therefore a risk assessment should be made to establish if tick prevention is required. Several factors should be considered:

- Are dogs walked on pasture shared by ruminants (cattle, sheep) or deer?
- Do dogs walk on land containing tall grass or bracken?
- Do cats and dogs visit areas known to have high levels of ticks?
- For more information please visit: <https://www.msd-animal-health-hub.co.uk/BFTP/why-protect/map-of-threats>
- Do cats roam freely or hunt? Do dogs live in or visit Essex or adjoining counties?
- Do cats or dogs have a history of tick exposure?
- Has the pet been imported or travelled abroad?



If when answering the questions above you would answer yes to 1 or more questions it is worth considering preventative tick treatments to reduce your pets risk of infection.

Removal of feedings

Ticks should be removed with a specialised tick removing tool – a tick hook - where possible, or if not very fine pointed tweezers. If a tick hook is used then a simple twist and pull action should be used. If tweezers are used, the tick should be grasped as close to the skin as possible then removed with a smooth upward pulling action. If you are unsure how to remove a tick, or are concerned that it has been done incorrectly please phone the surgery for advice.

Hypertension in Cats

Feline hypertension, high blood pressure (BP), affects up to 20% of senior cats. A feline consensus group recommends that to allow early detection of hypertension that cats have their BP checked regularly from 7 years of age.

So why worry about feline hypertension?

The concern with feline hypertension is that high blood pressure can result in damage to organs, referred to as 'target organ damage' (TOD). The main organs that are affected are the eyes, heart, kidneys and brain. Cats with hypertension can present suddenly with blindness, develop a heart murmur or rhythm abnormality, kidney damage, or neurological signs including signs of dementia, seizures or an unsteady gait. However a hypertensive cat may have vague symptoms (depression, lethargy) or no signs at all.

How is my cat's blood pressure taken?

There are a few different methods for blood pressure to be measured in cats. At Holmer Vet Surgery we currently use oscillometric blood pressure monitoring. Blood pressure readings can be taken, by a vet or nurse, in an extended consultation, and are best performed with you, the owner, present. After a short period of acclimatisation, where the cat is given around 5-10minutes to calm down from the journey to the surgery, the wait in the potentially busy waiting room and the unfamiliar consult room. A blood pressure cuff is then placed on the front leg, tail or occasionally back leg, this is inflated and as the pressure in the cuff goes down the pressure in the cat's vessels can be read. We take up to 10 readings in one sitting.



Will my cat need any other tests?

Because feline hypertension is seen in up to 60% of cats with chronic kidney disease and 10-20% of hyperthyroid cats we recommend your cat have a blood test and urine sample checked. If an underlying condition is found then you will be advised on what other treatment is recommended. The vet may also perform an eye exam when hypertension is detected as this may show eye damage in an otherwise apparently normal cat.

What can be done if my cat has hypertension?

If your cat has high blood pressure and obvious symptoms of TOD on presentation then they may be started on blood pressure tablets straight away. If high BP is detected in a cat with obvious, or non-specific, symptoms repeat BP checks will be needed, to confirm that the BP is consistently high and not just due to the stress of the vet visit, before antihypertensive medication is prescribed. If your cat goes onto BP medication then they will need to have routine check-ups for monitoring, to determine if dose adjustments are needed. Treatment for feline hypertension involves daily medication with tablets, ointment and/or syrup, which are very effective at lowering the blood pressure. Ideally treatment for hypertension is used to prevent organ damage i.e. before clinical signs are evident, treatment in the face of clinical signs will help prevent ongoing damage, and so alleviate associated symptoms, although sadly for many cats that present blind the blindness itself is irreversible.