

HOLMER VETERINARY SURGERY

Winter 2021 Newsletter

Welcome to our winter 2021 newsletter, another year has flown by. Whilst we are still in a period of transition, as the world learns and adjusts to a new normal with Covid, we feel fortunate to have more normality compared to a year ago. We were happy to start inviting clients back into the building just over a month ago. The building/renovation work is ongoing so we apologise for any noise or disruption you might experience during your visit to us, we are sure it will all be worth it in the end. This year saw a few staff changes, we bid a sad farewell to one of our nurses Suzie, but welcomed Bethany and Charlie into the Holmer Vet family. We have been proud to congratulate Chantel, Eliesha and Suzie who passed their vet nursing examinations this year to become RVNs (registered veterinary nurses).

For this edition of the practice newsletter we take a look at how to keep pets safe during the Christmas period, recognising potential hazards. We also follow on from previous articles on exotic diseases to look at the tick borne disease Ehrlichiosis, which sadly claimed the life of one of our patients, an imported rescue dog, earlier this year. If you have any questions or concerns related to either of these issues please do not hesitate to contact us for advise and support. We at Holmer Vet Surgery wish you all a very Merry Christmas and the best wishes for 2022, as always we will be here when you need.

Keeping your pets safe this Christmas.

Christmas trees are a wonderful festive staple but do possess some hazards for your pets that you may not have thought of. Fir trees produce an oil which is a mild toxin to cats that can cause mouth and gastrointestinal irritation if ingested. Pets are often adventurous so it is important to secure your tree with a heavy base, to help prevent a tree toppling and causing injury, especially in young and smaller animals. The needles of shedding trees can also be very sharp and could cause damage to the gut if ingested, so regular vacuuming is advisable.



When decorating your tree and house, tinsel and ribbons should be placed out of reach of pets, as if ingested they can cause potentially life-threatening intestinal blockages. Avoiding putting baubles at the bottom of the Christmas tree as it can be all too tempting for pets, particularly cats, to knock them off. Fragile baubles may shatter if dropped so pose a risk of causing injury to the pet's feet or worse to the pet's intestine if subsequently ingested, so it is important to ensure they are attached to the tree securely. It is best to avoid hanging wrapped chocolates on trees as these are toxic to dogs and cats. This would also apply for edible gifts under the tree, keeping them out of reach of pets ensures present and pet safety.

Poinsettia is a commonly found Christmas plant in a lot of homes, the plant is actually toxic to cats and dogs and can cause irritation of the mouth, hypersalivation, vomiting and diarrhoea. Mistletoe and Holly berries which are also popular as Christmas decoration are also toxic to dogs and cats when ingested, whilst signs are usually mild, similar to that seen with poinsettia, it is recommended that all these plants are displayed carefully out of reach of pets.

Food is a huge part of the Christmas celebrations in most households.

It is understandable that a lot of people want to give their pets treats for Christmas including parts of Christmas dinners, however it is important to note that a lot of aspects of traditional Christmas dinners are toxic or harmful to cats and dogs.

- Onions, Garlic, chives and Leeks, are often found in stuffing, gravies and some popular side dishes, all of these are part of the Allium family and are harmful to both cats and dogs. When ingested in large amounts they can cause damage to red blood cells with resultant anaemia, emesis (induced vomiting) is required to avoid toxicity.
- High fat food such as chicken skin, goose fat roast potatoes and sausages may seem like a harmless treat but when ingested, especially in large amounts, can cause pancreatitis, dogs can become very unwell with vomiting, diarrhoea, fever and abdominal pain being the most common symptoms. Different dogs have variable levels of susceptibility to developing pancreatitis with some breeds such as miniature schnauzers, miniature poodles and cocker spaniels considered to be more predisposed.
- Around Christmas there is often more alcohol around the house than normal. For cats and dogs, ingestion of alcohol can cause them to have low blood sugar, and low body temperature. Keeping alcohol including that in boozy treats out of reach will avoid pets getting access to them.
- Christmas pudding, mince pies and Christmas cake can not only contain alcohol but also do contain a lot of raisins and currents which are toxic to cats and dogs and can cause potentially fatal kidney failure.
- Ultimately the safest way to treat your pets is with pet approved treats.



It is also important to remember that whilst the excitement and preparations/changes to the home during the Christmas period such change can cause anxiety in some pets. Many dogs and even some cats may enjoy the extra company with the family spending more time at home and an increase in visitors bringing treats. However, some pets may find that lots of people, music, lights, and general increase in noises can be overwhelming. It is important that as owners we appreciate any adverse changes in the behaviour that our pets are exhibiting during the Christmas period or any other period of change, to be able to identify any negative triggers.

Pets need to feel calm and safe or there is a risk they will demonstrate destructive or aversive behaviours (snapping, growling) or even avoidance behaviours including running away. Some owners will already be aware of their pet's anxieties but for others signs may be new and often subtle.

It is important pets are given the choice as to whether to be involved in the Christmas festivities or withdrawal away to a calm quiet safe space. Animals should not be forced into an area that they feel uncomfortable, especially around young children. Instead create a safe space for them where they can relax and where they can get away if they feel anxious or stressed. Pets will often indicate where they want to be or you may want to create a den, cats typically feel safest in a raised area (assuming they can get access to it). Wherever the pets safe place is they should have guaranteed access to the area at all times. Calming diffusers which are available for cats and dogs (Feliway, Adaptil) can also help some dogs and cats feel safer in their environment. Non-prescription anti-anxiety medications such as Zylkene and Calmex are also available from Holmer Vets may also be of additional benefit in help calm anxious pets. For animals with more severe anxieties, we recommend you book an appointment to see a vet who may recommend prescription medication and/or referral to a certified behaviour specialist.

In short, have a wonderful and safe Christmas. Spoil your pets with family walks, safe treats and toys, and enjoy this time with them. As always please call us at Holmer Vets if you need us, we are here to help.

Ehrlichiosis:

What is Ehrlichiosis?

Ehrlichiosis is caused by the rickettsia (a specialised type of bacteria) *Ehrlichia canis*, that is caught/transmitted via a bite from an infected brown dog tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*). Currently the tick that transmits the bacteria is not endemic in the UK, however there have been 2 confirmed cases of Ehrlichiosis in untravelled dogs in the south east of England.

What are the symptoms of Ehrlichiosis?

Clinical signs appear 8-20 days after infection and there are three stages of disease:

Acute phase

Early signs are mild and non-specific symptoms including fever, reduced appetite and enlarged lymph nodes. The acute phase can last for up to 4 weeks and symptoms may go away without treatment.

Asymptomatic phase

Once recovered from the acute disease untreated dogs may become persistent carriers of the disease whilst appearing clinically well. The asymptomatic phase can last for months to years. Dogs will either go on to recover from the disease spontaneously or develop chronic infection.

Chronic phase

Symptoms of chronic ehrlichiosis are often more severe than those seen in the acute phase of the disease. A variety of symptoms can be seen including fever, weight loss, bleeding problems, enlarged lymph nodes, pain and stiffness, coughing, gastrointestinal signs (vomiting and diarrhoea) and neurological signs. Without treatment the symptoms will persist, chronic ehrlichiosis can be fatal.

How can ehrlichiosis be prevented?

Avoiding areas where the brown dog tick is found is the best option, the tick is endemic in many European countries such as France, Greece, Spain and Italy. If you plan on importing a dog from abroad it is strongly advisable to get it tested for ehrlichiosis and other exotic disease before commencing travel into the UK.

Where avoidance can not be relied upon using a reliable tick repellent/treatment is the next best option. There is no product available that reliably repels ticks 100% of time to prevent bites so it is not possible to completely eliminate the risk of infection when taking your dog to an endemic area. It is not known what the minimum required time for tick attachment to be able to transmit infection is, therefore using a product that rapidly kills a tick is advisable.

Please speak to one of our vets to help choose the best product for your pets needs.

Regularly checking your dog for ticks and removing any found is also advisable. There is currently no vaccine available against ehrlichiosis.

