



# John Ball & Associates

## Veterinary Surgeons

# NEWS

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SPRING 2024

### Spring hazards!



As the weather improves and we thankfully leave winter behind us, take a moment to consider some hazards at this time of year for your pets.

Easter often is a time for indulgence and our homes have lovely sweet treats in them. It is therefore important that you are aware of common items in your home that are poisonous for your pets, and where possible, avoid any exposure. Bear in mind a dog's nose can very easily sniff out treats such as chocolates or hot cross buns!

**Chocolate:** Dogs are very susceptible to chocolate toxicity. The stronger the chocolate, the more dangerous it can be and may cause fatal neurological signs.



**Sultanas and raisins** – found in hot cross buns, fruit cakes and the like, are also toxic for your dog. They can cause symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhoea and, in severe cases, kidney failure. Grapes are similarly a hazard for dogs.



**Xylitol** is an artificial sweetener, found in things like sugar free chewing gum. It can be also used as a sweetener in home baking. Xylitol is extremely toxic to dogs, so again is something to be avoided.



Turning to cats, **lilies** are a toxic hazard. Chewing the leaves or grooming pollen off their coats can lead to severe kidney failure.

Another feline hazard – **permethrin flea treatments for DOGS**, are very toxic to *cats*, so make sure they are never accidentally applied to cats. Keep your pets safe and please contact us if you have any concerns.

### Spring parasite alert!

The arrival of Spring heralds better weather and warmer temperatures. However the downside is this also increases the number of pesky parasites keen to feed on our pets.



**Fleas** love the warm weather, and in addition to your home, they thrive outside in parks and gardens. Here, any dormant flea eggs from last year will rapidly hatch out into adult fleas. These hop onto passing pets, bringing dozens of these tiny pests back into your home. Adult fleas feed on your pet's blood, causing a range of problems including itchy skin, rashes and hair loss. Worse still, they hop off our pets and make their home in pet beds, carpets and soft furnishings, where the flea life-cycle is perpetuated.



The best way to prevent fleas is year-round treatment for all your pets with veterinary-licensed flea products. These are very effective at killing fleas and will kill them *before* they lay their eggs, with the aim of preventing infestations in your home.

**Ticks** are tiny spider-like creatures and are most active from March to October, living in long grass and woodlands. Here they wait to attach themselves to passing pets, and feed off their blood for several days. Unlike fleas, ticks are not itchy, but can spread a range of serious tick-borne diseases including: **Lyme disease** – affected pets (and also humans) can develop swollen joints and stiffness, and often a range of other symptoms. In mainland Europe, **Babesiosis** (caused by *Babesia canis*) is an emerging tick-borne disease, destroying red blood cells and causing acute anaemia in affected dogs. **Erlchiosis** also attacks red blood cells and can be fatal. Both Babesiosis and Erlchiosis are particularly prevalent in mainland Europe, so if you take your dog abroad on holiday, it is essential to protect them against ticks.

The good news is that current evidence suggests that tick-borne diseases take many hours after tick attachment to be transmitted. Using a treatment that rapidly kills or repels ticks will help to reduce the risk of these diseases. No tick product is 100% effective however, so pets should also be checked for ticks every 12-24 hours and, any found, removed with a special tick remover.

If you would like further information on flea and tick prevention, or parasite prevention more generally, please ask a member of our practice team – we are happy to help.



#### Removing ticks

Attached ticks with buried mouthparts are often found whilst grooming your pets. Ticks are best removed with a specially designed tick hook with a twisting action.



### Kennel Cough – is your dog vaccinated?



Kennel cough is a very infectious, but rarely life-threatening, respiratory infection that spreads from dog to dog wherever they meet – out on walks, training classes and of course kennels. The condition can involve several viral components, plus a bacterium – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*.

It causes a harsh cough, an inflamed throat and sometimes nasal discharge. The signs can be dramatic, and it is not uncommon for owners to become concerned their pets have something stuck in their throats. The cough is often self-limiting, but can still persist for 2-3 weeks.

Only an annual vaccination with a specific kennel cough vaccine can offer protection against *Bordetella*. So – don't take any chances with this distressing cough – make sure your pet is vaccinated. Kennel cough vaccination is also a key requirement of most boarding kennels. Please contact us today for further information or to book an appointment!

For further information on any of the topics covered in this newsletter, please contact your practice.

Telephone Numbers: Kingston 020 8549 3567; Ditton Reach 020 8224 5454; Cobham: 01932 868786  
Out of Hours 020 8783 2850

## Alabama Rot



Alabama Rot is a disease that has been hitting the headlines recently. It has gained attention because it is hard to diagnose but is often fatal. However, it is important to remember that it is also very rare.



Typical photo of a suspected case of Alabama Rot with skin lesions

At the moment, the cause of the condition is unknown. It is often seen in dogs who have recently been walked in muddy or wet weather and there are certain 'hot spots' in the UK and Ireland where it is more frequently found but there are no hard and fast rules.

Typical presenting signs include ulcerated and abnormal lesions on dogs' skin, especially the lower legs, paws and face. It can, in rare cases, cause acute kidney failure by producing multiple small blood clots within the tissue, leading to kidney cell death, which is of course very serious. Fortunately it is still very rare and additionally, most skin lesions will not be related to Alabama Rot; however, if you notice any unusual skin patterns on your dog's skin and need any advice please contact us straight away at the surgery.

## Ear disease – is my pet affected?

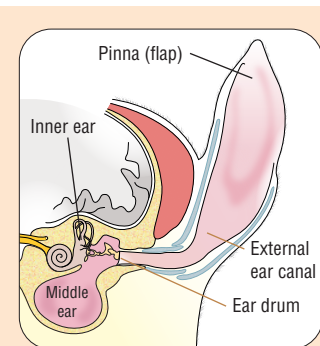


Your pet's ears come in all shapes and sizes and anatomically consist of three major components: The **outer ear** with a large pinna (or flap) – to gather sound waves, which then pass down the external ear canal to the ear drum where the sound is transmitted as vibrations to the small bones of the **middle ear**, and then onto the **inner ear** where it is turned into electrical signals which are perceived as sound.

Thankfully, most of the time your pet will have clean comfortable ears. You can gently open the ear flap and check the ear looks clean, the skin does not look sore, and check for unusual odours. The vast majority of ear problems in pets occur in the *external ear canal* – termed *otitis externa*. Symptoms include ear rubbing, and head shaking. Additionally there is often a discharge which may be foul smelling. There are several underlying causes of otitis externa:

- **Ear mite** infestations with *Otodectes cynotis* are commonly seen in puppies and kittens and is usually associated with a crusty brown discharge.
- **Localised allergies** affecting the skin lining the external ear canal are another common cause, leading to scratching, which allows opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections to infect the external ear canal.
- **Grass awns** of the meadow grasses are another common problem and often present with sudden-onset head shaking.

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. If you would like any further information or are concerned your pet's ears are causing problems, please bring your pet in for a check-up.



A typical ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal



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

## Worming worries!



Worms are something all pet owners need to be aware of, and treat for periodically. There are three main worms we are concerned about, and can treat – tapeworms, roundworms and lungworms.

**Roundworms** are most commonly found in young animals but can infect adults as well. Many pups and kittens are born infected with roundworms because they cross the placenta and are also in the milk. Roundworms look like long strings of spaghetti but are usually only seen if there is a heavy burden or you give your pet a dewormer.

Adult roundworms shed eggs which are passed out in your pet's faeces and infect the environment. The eggs become infective within a few weeks and pets can become re-infected by unwittingly eating the eggs, often whilst grooming. Additionally the eggs can pose a risk to humans if accidentally ingested.



Roundworms are long, white and spaghetti like.

**Tapeworms** live in the intestines and shed small *mobile* segments that pass out in the faeces and are often found around the tail areas of cats. As the segments break down, they release eggs into the environment. These eggs may be eaten by *intermediate hosts* – these include **fleas** and **small rodents** such as mice and voles. As a result, tapeworms can be acquired via food (cats eating small rodents) or via swallowing an infected flea during grooming. Pets with tapeworms may not show any obvious clinical signs, meaning that they can be carried silently. Some animals will show failure to thrive, malaise and diarrhoea.

**Lungworm:** The two main lungworms of concern are *Angiostrongylus vasorum* in dogs and *Aelurostrongylus abstrusus* in cats. In dogs the main way of catching this lungworm is if they eat slugs or snails which often happens when they eat grass. The worms eventually migrate to the lungs where they can cause a cough, breathing difficulties or heart failure. However the worms also cause bleeding which means clinical signs can vary depending on where the dog bleeds (e.g. seizures due to bleed on the brain). In cats, they become infected in a similar way or even if they eat infected prey. Cats may show coughing, breathing difficulties, weight loss and poor appetite. With all lungworms, due to the severity of signs shown, this can make pets really unwell.



Tapeworms are long segmented worms which shed segments.



Electron-micrograph of an adult *A. vasorum* (courtesy Bayer).

Regular prescription worming and flea treatments for your pet, picking up dog faeces, good hand hygiene, plus attempting to prevent your dogs eating slugs and snails, will all help to keep you and your pet safe.