



John Ball & Associates Veterinary Surgeons

NEWS

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Booster Alert!

Amongst all the hustle and bustle of winter don't forget to check your pet's vaccines are up to date!

There are vaccines available for dogs, cats and rabbits. Vaccines are given against a range of infectious diseases that are often deadly and have no cure if contracted.



Dogs: In dogs the main diseases we vaccinate against are **Parvovirus, Hepatitis, Adenovirus, Leptospirosis** and **Distemper**. All of these diseases can prove fatal and can be very challenging to treat. Leptospirosis for example can cause liver and kidney problems and is contracted from rats, other dogs and wildlife. It is often fatal and is also infectious to humans (called a zoonosis). We can also protect dogs against **Kennel Cough**, which although less serious, is highly infectious.



Cats: We recommend vaccinating cats against Cat flu, Feline Leukaemia and Feline Enteritis.

Cat Flu is spread by airborne virus droplets. Cats are often very unwell with flu-like symptoms, which often become a long-term issue and it can be fatal in the old and the young.

Feline Leukaemia (FeLV) is acquired via cat fights and direct cat to cat contact. FeLV is usually fatal, typically within a couple of years of contracting the virus.

Feline Enteritis is thankfully rare, mainly due to vaccination.



Rabbits: In rabbits we recommend vaccinating against **Myxomatosis** and **Viral Haemorrhagic Disease** (which exists in two strains RVHD1 and RVHD2). All three of these viruses are frequently deadly, and often occur with very little warning.

So – if your pet's booster vaccines are out of date, don't delay, make an appointment today!

Should I have my pet neutered?

Neutering your pet comes with a range of health and welfare benefits. One of the most important benefits is preventing unwanted pregnancies. This is especially important in cats and rabbits where un-neutered animals can have several litters per year! In addition to this, neutered pets are likely to live longer lives thanks to surgical procedures which are safe, quick and relatively painless. Here we look at some of the benefits of neutering your pets.



Female cats will start their first season from as early as four months of age and may come into heat (season) every three weeks during the breeding season (classically spring to autumn). By neutering your cat, as well as avoiding unwanted litters of kittens, you will also reduce the risk of mammary cancer later in life, which is often very aggressive in cats.



Male cats: fighting and aggression are a common feature of un-neutered male cats, especially between competing male cats. Un-neutered male cats will spray urine to mark territory and this has a very strong smell. They are also more likely to roam further afield looking for females, increasing their risk of being in car accidents and cat fights.

Female dogs: Un-neutered female dogs usually come into heat every six months. During this time your dog will be receptive to the advances of entire male dogs in your area. The urge to mate can lead to roaming, with the associated risk of becoming permanently lost or seriously injured. Apart from avoiding unplanned pregnancies, neutering also reduces the risk of two important conditions later in life: If they are left un-neutered, around 25% may suffer from mammary (breast) cancer and a similar proportion are at risk of developing an infected uterus (pyometra). Both of these are very serious, require surgery, and are potentially fatal.



Male dogs: neutering removes the risk of testicular tumours and a problem reduces the risk of prostate problems. For some pets, neutering can also help with behaviour problems.

As you can see, there are many benefits to having your pets neutered! If you would like further information, please contact a member of our team.

Neutering rabbits

There are several benefits to neutering rabbits: As well as preventing unwanted pregnancies, neutered rabbits are generally less likely to fight and will be easier for you to handle. Neutering also removes the risk of uterine tumours in female rabbits.

Pet Insurance – are your pets protected?



Pet insurance is something that we advise all our owners consider for their animals. We know that vet bills are often unexpected and can mount up over time, so having a good policy will really combat the worry of being able to afford their care; whether it is a one-off misadventure or a longer-term illness (such as a skin, heart or joint condition).

There are several different kinds of policies; '12 month' ones will only cover a condition for the first year after diagnosis, whereas 'life long' will continue to pay for treatment for as long as is necessary. Some will pay up to a certain amount per condition, whereas others are unlimited. So you really need to understand the policy before taking it out.

On a daily basis we see the heart wrenching decisions some of our clients face regarding the treatment of their pets, but with appropriate pet insurance, we can hopefully ensure that any treatment decisions are made on the basis of need rather than cost. If you would like any further information on the benefits of insuring your pets, please don't hesitate to ask!

Rabbit and spaniel photos: Warren Photographic

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

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Winter weather alert!

The cold winter months bring particular challenges for our pets, and as their owners, we need to be aware of the problems they can suffer at this time of year. Here we look at some of the commonest winter hazards:

Winter walks: When you are out and about, it's important to make sure that your pets are adequately prepared; they may need to wear waterproof and warm jackets, especially if they are older or are short coated breeds such as whippets. Some salt mixtures on paths, and also snow building up between the paws, can cause limping and pain. So, do check your pet's feet regularly and make sure they are washed and clean on return from a walk.

Sore joints: Pets with joint problems often start to struggle in the colder weather. Look out for hanging back on walks, stiffness in the mornings or them being reluctant to go out. Many pets will benefit from anti-inflammatory medication and also joint supplements. You can also help by giving them lovely soft beds, and many will enjoy resting by the radiator or on a pet-safe hot water bottle!



Outdoor pets: Rabbits and guinea pigs are ideally brought into a heated garage or shed, or moved inside. Make sure they have plenty of bedding and that their water supply is fresh twice daily. Check your small furrries at least once a day to make sure they are bright, eating and well. If you have a rabbit or guinea pig who lives alone, now is the ideal time to think about getting a friend of the same species so they have someone to cuddle up with!



Festive alert! During the festive season, make sure all your decorations and wires are out of reach of pets since they make very tempting toys! This is the time of year for indulgence and perhaps different foods in the house to normal. A reminder that chocolate, grapes, raisins, onions and the sweetener xylitol are poisonous; these are often in abundance in festive foods. Please ensure they are kept safely away from your pets – it's surprising how many dogs can sniff out delicious treats and then help themselves! Flowers like lilies are especially toxic for cats. Even the seasonal favourite, the poinsettia, can cause irritation if eaten.

For further information on any of the topics mentioned in this article, please speak to a member of our practice team who will be happy to help!

Worming worries!



Does worming your pets seem like a constant battle? Unfortunately you can't vaccinate against worms, so regular worming treatment is the only way to ensure your pets stay worm free! There are three main worms we are concerned about, and can treat – tapeworms, roundworms and lungworms. Roundworms and tapeworms inhabit your pet's intestines, interfering with food absorption and may also be a cause of gut inflammation, failure to thrive and diarrhoea. Lungworms, as their name suggests, spend much of their time in the lungs.

Tapeworms are long flat, segmented worms which live in the small intestines. They 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 cats which are "mousers" will commonly have tapeworms. Similarly pets swallow fleas as they groom, and so re-infect themselves with tapeworms.



Tapeworms are long segmented worms which shed segments.

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. They are spaghetti like in appearance and also live in the small intestines. They can cause weight loss, vomiting, diarrhoea and a pot belly in puppies and kittens. Adult roundworms shed eggs which are passed out in your pet's faeces and infect the environment. 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.

Lungworm (also known as *Angiostrongylus Vasorum*) causes life threatening disease in dogs. Slugs and snails act as 'intermediate hosts' and are commonly infected with immature lungworm larvae. If infected slugs and snails are eaten by a dog, the larvae migrate to their lungs. Here they develop into adult worms up to 2cm in size. The adults live and lay eggs inside the vessels of the lungs and the right side of the heart, causing symptoms such as coughing and exercise intolerance. Larvae migrate into lung tissue, causing blood clots, bleeding problems and even sudden death. The larvae are coughed up and pass out in the faeces where they are eaten by slugs and snails, so continuing the lifecycle. Lungworm is also very prevalent in foxes.



There are a variety of **veterinary licenced** treatments to prevent worm infections which are easy to administer and suitable for dogs and cats. Please contact us to find out how we can help you best protect your pets.



Choosing the correct diet!

There are so many different diets out there so how do you choose? The most important thing is that your pet's diet needs to be balanced and in the correct quantities.

To help with this, many pet foods have a selection of age ranges, such as puppy or kitten, junior, adult and senior. These are to help tailor the calorie and nutritional contents to the age of your pet. Some also have specially designed breed types or breed sizes, such as giant and large breed dogs. It is very important that your pet stays a healthy weight to reduce illnesses in later life. Neutered diets and lower calorie diets are available to help maintain a balanced weight.

If your pet has an illness, a specific veterinary diet may help with your pet's condition. Kidney diets are low in some toxins and waste products to reduce the chemicals your pet's body needs to eliminate. Intestinal diets are designed to help with short and long term digestive issues. With diets designed for fur balls in cats, diabetes and liver disease, the choice is endless.

So – if you need any advice regarding your pet's diet, please don't hesitate to ask!