

Disease implications of taking your pet abroad.

If you visit the doctor prior to going on holiday, you may well be warned about certain diseases such as malaria. Such warnings are not designed to intimidate or to stop you from travelling, but instead are aimed at educating and allowing preventative health measures, such as anti-malarial tablets, to be taken. Whilst dogs and cats cannot contract malaria, they can be affected by many other exotic conditions. Once again, these are not reasons not to travel, but important conditions of which you should be aware. Whilst vaccinations are not available against these exotic diseases, preventative measures are available, and should always be used to protect your pet when travelling.

Heart worm

Heartworm is caused by a species of roundworm (*Dirofilaria immitis*.) This is spread by mosquitoes, and can cause major heart problems, since the adults, which are up to a foot long, live in the blood vessels leading out of the heart. The worm needs warm temperatures to be spread; thus whilst Jersey and the UK are currently free of the disease, continental Europe roughly South of Paris is seen as an at-risk area. The disease is hard to treat, but easy to prevent with either **Stronghold**, **Advocate**, **Milbemax** or **Program Plus**, each used monthly, starting at least 1 week before travel, and continuing monthly so that the final treatment is after the return to Jersey or the UK.

Tick-borne diseases

Although the *Ixodes* ticks present in Jersey can spread some diseases, the *Rhiphcephalus* and *Dermacentor* ticks present throughout the continent can carry much more serious diseases such as *Ehrlichia* and *Babesia*. These can lead to clinical signs such as fever, bleeding, red blood cell damage and liver and kidney failure. Whilst these potentially fatal diseases are hard to treat, and no specific preventative measures are available, tick control measures can help prevent them. The use of **Advantix** (in dogs only), **Practic** (also in dogs only) or **Frontline** will help, but additionally your pet should be checked at least daily for any ticks. If a tick is found, it should be carefully removed, preferably with an **O'Tom Hook**, since this removes the tick without increasing the risk of spreading diseases. Removal of the tick by burning, coating it in Vaseline or using tweezers should be a last resort, since these methods can cause more diseases to be transmitted.

Leishmaniasis

Leishmania is caused by a protozoa, (*Leishmania infantum*.) which is spread by sand-flies. This disease is very common in the Mediterranean area, especially southern France, Spain and Portugal, and unprotected animals entering these areas almost inevitably become infected, although the vast majority will not develop any clinical signs.

However, those that do may suffer intermittent fever, lethargy, bleeding disorders and liver and kidney damage. A characteristic silvery dandruff may also be seen on the nose and around the eyes. Whilst hard to treat, and difficult to prevent, it is important to remember that most animals will not develop signs. However, measures to limit sand-fly exposure, such as keeping animals inside at dawn and dusk and using sand-fly repellents, such as **Advantix** (in dogs only), may be of benefit.

Diseases present in the UK

Whilst most of the diseases in the UK can also be found in Jersey, and so are protected against by your annual vaccinations and standard wormers/ flea treatments, there are some exceptions. Lungworm is a very serious condition, spread by slugs and snails, which can cause pneumonia and severe bleeding problems. It is found across most of the UK and Ireland. Sarcoptic mange (absent from Jersey) can also be found in the mainland, especially where foxes are present. Both can be prevented with a single product (**Advocate**) applied monthly. **Stronghold** is also affective against sarcoptic mange.

Additional health issues

Ensure your pet is healthy and fit for the journey. Some airlines will ask for a private 'fitness to travel certificate' which a vet can issue. Ensure that if your pet is on medication that you have sufficient for the duration of your trip, including possible delays. Even if similar medication is available abroad, brands and doses may be different. Have a basic first aid kit available and establish the location of a vet in the area. In hot climates beware of heat stroke, as the weather may be far hotter than your pet is normally used to, especially when travelling in vehicles for long periods. This is especially important if your pet has an underlying respiratory or cardiac condition. If possible travel at night when it is cooler. Always carry additional water for your pet to drink, and also to help if cooling is necessary. Always ensure the ferry company know there is a live animal in your car, and make sure there is enough ventilation for their needs. Never leave your pet in a car in direct sunlight, or at high temperatures. Also be careful in freezing conditions, as hypothermia can be rapidly fatal, especially if your dog becomes wet. Check that any coats you use on your pet do not rub, and in snowy conditions check that ice is not becoming trapped between your dog's toes.

Additional issues when travelling

If going abroad, ensure that you have complied with all requirements of the PETS travel scheme. Failure to complete all precise requirements, or having incomplete paperwork, may prevent your pet from being allowed back into Jersey or the UK. If travelling by air, ensure your pet is in an approved carrier, which is of adequate size, clean, leak-proof and escape-proof. Some breeds may face additional restrictions abroad, for example Rottweilers must be muzzled and kept on the lead in public places in France. If possible take food for your pet with you, rather than buying it abroad. Even when similar brands are available abroad, small differences in their ingredients can frequently lead to diarrhoea. Ensure that your standard annual vaccinations are up to date, as many of these diseases are far more common in the UK and abroad than in Jersey. Check with your insurance company that your cover is valid when away from Jersey. Having a photo of your pet in the passport can help if your pet becomes lost.

All of these risks are something to be aware of, rather than reasons not to travel. Diagnosis of the diseases can be challenging since their symptoms may often be non-specific, intermittent or delayed years after exposure. Even years after going abroad, mentioning to your vet any history of travel may help reach a diagnosis more rapidly. Prevention is important, and all of the preventative measures discussed above can be used together. For more information on any the products mentioned, or the diseases themselves, please speak to one of our vets.