

Reducing disease risk for dogs travelling to Europe

Pet Disease Risks in Europe:

When travelling with your pet in Europe there are a number of diseases that they may come into contact with. There are several steps that you can take to reduce the risks to your pet which we will discuss below. However, one of the best ways of reducing this is to avoid contact with other dogs that live in the country you visit.

What are the main disease risks?

The main disease risks on the continent are protozoal diseases Babesiosis, Leishmaniasis, and Ehrlichiosis, the bacterial disease Brucellosis, and the parasitic disease heartworm *Dirofilaria*.

All these diseases are transmitted by insects and are potentially life threatening. Some are also transmissible to humans.

Leishmania

This is transmitted by a biting fly called the Sand Fly. It is present in many countries in Southern and Eastern Europe, but the incidence is gradually spreading further. The disease can present in several ways such as weight loss, skin and eye lesions, lameness, enlarged lymph nodes and kidney failure. Symptoms may not develop for some time after infection, can come and go over many years and can be difficult to treat.

Dogs can be vaccinated against leishmaniasis & this is advised for any dog travelling for extended periods in the at-risk areas. We also recommend using a Scalibor collar to prevent sandfly bites.

Heartworm

Heartworm (*dirofilaria*) is transmitted by mosquitoes. It is found in large areas of southern Europe but is creeping further north. Heartworms live in the heart and large blood vessels causing heart failure and breathing problems. The symptoms occur about 6-12 months after infection when the worms have built up to large numbers. Treatment is difficult as large numbers of dead worms are as serious as the problems they cause when alive therefore prevention is the key with this disease.

We advise treating with Milprazon tablets (a broad spectrum worming treatment) monthly, starting one week prior to travel and continuing monthly, with the last dose one month after return to the UK.

We also recommend the use of a Scalibor collar to prevent mosquito bites.

Ehrlichia and Babesia

Ehrlichia and Babesia are transmitted by infected tick bites and are prevalent throughout Europe.

Ehrlichia affects the white blood cells. Affected dogs develop a fever & some may have long term problems with their immune system. Symptoms occur 1-3 weeks after infection.

Babesia causes anaemia. Signs include weakness, panting, red urine and collapse. Symptoms usually occur 2-3 weeks after infection.

We recommend using a tick treatment at the correct intervals to kill ticks within the first 24 hours. A daily check should be made of your dog to identify any ticks - any ticks found should be removed immediately. We advise the use of a Scalibor collar to repel ticks & Bravecto tablets or spot on, to kill any ticks that attach.

Brucella

Another tick-borne disease endemic in many areas of Europe, can also be spread from dog to dog, & dog to human & can be very difficult to treat. We advise the use of a scalibor collar to help prevent tick bites. We recommend blood testing for Brucella 6 months after return to the UK for any dog that is in contact with other dogs whilst travelling.

Checklist:

- Scalibor collar applied 7 days prior to travel, effective for 5 months
- Milprazon tablets – start 7 days prior to travel and continue monthly until 1 month after return to UK.
- Leishmaniasis vaccination – For dogs travelling regularly or for extended periods in Southern Europe. This consists of a primary course of 3 vaccinations over a 6-week period, followed by a single annual vaccination thereafter.
- Regular flea/tick treatment – eg, Bravecto tablet or spot on every 12 weeks.
- Blood test for Brucella 6 months after return to UK. This can be done at the practice with same day results.