

New tick-borne disease in the UK – what do we need to know?

What are ticks?

Ticks have always been a problem in the UK. They are spider-like creatures that feed on the blood of animals including dogs and cats (and sometimes humans). Ticks can be found across the UK – particularly in woodland, moorland, and grazing pasture but also in parks and gardens.



What damage do ticks cause?

The ticks attach to animals and feed on their blood for 5 - 7 days before dropping off again. Attached ticks can cause discomfort and blood loss, but in many cases pets appear unaware of their presence. The big concern is that ticks can carry infectious diseases and pass these on to the animals when they feed.

What infections do ticks in the UK carry?

The ticks that are commonly found in the United Kingdom may carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease. Lyme disease can affect dogs and people and is often very difficult to diagnose.

What about ticks in mainland Europe?

Other species of ticks live in mainland Europe and these can carry additional diseases. One of these diseases is babesiosis – a blood parasite that causes a life-threatening anaemia.

What has been happening this week?

Over recent years, we have started to find small numbers of these European ticks in the UK. It now appears that these ticks have brought a new disease into the UK. This week a veterinary practice in Essex reported at least four cases of dogs contracting babesiosis. One of the dogs diagnosed died and two others required blood transfusions.

What is likely to happen now?

Experts consider it inevitable that babesiosis will now spread across the UK, particularly as our climate becomes more favourable for ticks and parasites. Vets and pet owners have been urged to take precautions to protect the pets in their care.

How can we protect our pets?

Babesiosis is transmitted by ticks when they feed. So prevention is aimed at avoiding tick bites, and removing ticks as soon as possible if they do bite.

- Avoid high risk areas (grazing pasture, wooded areas) where possible
- Check pets daily for ticks and remove them immediately
- Use products that repel ticks so that they do not attach and feed; or
- Use products that cause the ticks to detach and fall off quickly if they do start to feed
- Contact your vet promptly if your pet shows signs of ill health (for babesiosis the main signs are lethargy, pale gums, high temperature and dark urine)

How do I safely remove a tick?

If you find a tick on your pet it is important to remove it completely so that the mouthparts do not break off beneath your pet's skin. If you would like assistance in removing a tick (or confirming that a lump on your pet is indeed a tick) please make an appointment with one of our veterinary nurses at the surgery.

We recommend using a tick hook – a curved plastic device that slides underneath the body of the tick, on top of your pet's skin. The hook can then be gently rotated until the tick lifts off, bringing the mouthparts with it. These tick hooks can be purchased from the surgery and should be part of every pet owner's first aid kit.



What sort of products are available to repel or kill ticks?

There are many different products available for tick control. There are special collars and spot-on products that will repel ticks so that they never attach. Other spot-on products and tablets are available that kill ticks within 24-48 hours of attaching, thus reducing the risk of infections being passed on.

These are all prescription products. Some are products that are already routinely used by our clients for regular tick and flea control. We have also ordered in some additional products to provide more tick control options for

our clients in the light of this new disease outbreak. Please contact the surgery to discuss your pet's needs in more detail.



Our delivery of new tick control products has arrived!



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