



canis

Travelling to Europe – disease risks

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An increasing number of owners are taking their pets with them on holiday when they travel to continental Europe. This factsheet provides information on the more important novel diseases that your dog may come into contact with abroad.

What are the main disease risks abroad?

There are a number of protozoal diseases found in continental Europe that can be transmitted to your dog. These diseases include Babesiosis, Leishmaniasis, and Ehrlichiosis. These diseases are rarely seen in the UK and, consequently, British dogs are unlikely to have developed any protective immunity to them. Your dog may also be exposed to a number of parasitic worms including the heart worm *Dirofilaria* and the tapeworm *Echinococcus granulosus*. There also exists the small possibility of your dog being exposed to rabies.

How are these diseases transmitted to dogs?

All the protozoal diseases mentioned above are transmitted by insects. Babesia and Ehrlichia are carried by ticks and Leishmania by a small biting fly called the Sand fly. The heart worm is transmitted by biting mosquitoes. Echinococcus can be caught by eating the tape worm egg, usually in uncooked meat. Rabies is most commonly transmitted following a bite from a rabid dog or other animal.

How serious are these diseases?

All of these diseases, with the exception of *Echinococcus*, are potentially life threatening. British dogs are unlikely to have any natural resistance to these diseases and may therefore be particularly badly affected.

When and where are these diseases found?

The areas where these diseases may be found is constantly enlarging. Some of these diseases are more common in certain places, or at particular times of the year depending on the distribution and feeding activity of the vectors (ticks and biting flies).

Canine Leishmaniasis occurs in most of the countries surrounding the Mediterranean basin, including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain.

The sand fly season stretches from May /June to September /October.

Babesiosis is widespread in France and constantly evolving; it has been reported both in the South West and, more recently, in Normandy and Paris. There is a peak of disease both in the Autumn and Spring, with the condition almost disappearing during the months of July and August.

Monocytic ehrlichiosis is an important disease of dogs in southern Europe and other areas of the Mediterranean basin.

How can I protect my dog?

British dogs holidaying on the continent should be protected from tick bites:

- Dogs should be treated with a product that kills ticks before they have started feeding (within 24hrs).
- This treatment should be repeated at the prescribed interval(s) for tick prevention. You may need to apply the product more often than you would if you were treating your pet for fleas.
- A daily check should be made of your dog to identify any ticks any ticks found should be removed immediately. You can take your pet to a veterinary practice to have this done but it may be useful to obtain training in the removal of ticks from your dog prior to travelling.

British dogs holidaying on the continent should be protected against biting flies and mosquitoes:

- Spray your dog regularly with a licensed fly repellent.
- Treatment with the fly repellent should be repeated at the prescribed interval(s).
- Dogs should be kept indoors during the evening and night time to further minimise the risks from biting sand flies.

Use of a deltamethrin collar (Scalibor, Intervet) provides 5-6 months protection against ticks and sand flies.

Pine processionary caterpillars, found in pine woods in central and southern Europe, can cause a serious reaction in dogs and contact should be avoided. It is essential that dogs be prevented from licking caterpillars, and their hairs, as this can cause profound swelling of the oral tissues and, in extreme cases, may even lead to loss of the tongue. Caterpillar hairs should therefore be removed from the dog's hair coat as quickly as possible.

If making regular visits to the continent you may want to have your dog vaccinated against babesiosis. A vaccine is available in France for this purpose.

Treatment with a wormer containing Praziquantel is required before returning to the UK in order to eliminate infection with *Echinococcus* tapeworms.

What do I do if my dog is bitten by another dog?

If your dog is involved in a dog fight the first priority is to ensure that you do not get bitten yourself. All dogs travelling abroad and intending to return to the UK with quarantine must be vaccinated against rabies. If your dog is vaccinated and has responded to the vaccine, it will have some degree of protection against rabies. You should, however, consult a vet for further treatment and advice.

In France, any dog that has bitten another dog, person or other animal must, by law, be placed under veterinary surveillance. This allows any dog with rabies to be identified as early as possible.

What do I do if my dog is unwell?

If your dog is unwell, lame, off its food or otherwise ill, whilst you are abroad, you should seek further advice from a local vet. If on your return to the UK, your dog develops a fever or other symptoms, including skin problems, you should seek advice from your vet and mention the fact that your dog has travelled abroad and may have been exposed to ticks and biting flies.

Whilst tick bites are usually required for transmission of babesia, the possibility of other forms of transmission should not be overlooked. This should be borne in mind if your dog requires a blood transfusion whilst abroad. The transmission of other protozoal parasites following a blood transfusion is also possible. The blood donor should be tested for these diseases before donating blood.

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