ashlands News

Veterinary Centre

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Microchips matter!

It's sadly all too easy for pets to go missing and if this happens it could mean days or weeks of worry for all involved. However the good news is that microchip implants offer a far more reliable method of identifying your pet than the traditional collar and tag.

It is now law in the UK for any dog over eight weeks of age to be microchipped. All puppies must be chipped before leaving the breeder and should not leave their premises until they are eight weeks old.

Veterinary practices, the police and animal charities have microchip scanners and routinely scan strays. Should your pet go missing and be handed in as a stray, if they are microchipped, this will give you the best chance of them being reliably identified and returned to you. It's also very important to ensure your details are kept up-to-date with the microchip company and to notify them if any contact details have been changed. In the event your dog is not microchipped you could be liable for a fine of £500.

It is also a very good idea to have your cat microchipped! Cats can easily go missing as a result of road traffic accidents and, when found, are often taken to a local charity or veterinary practice. But without a microchip, a huge number are never reunited with their owners for one simple reason – they cannot be reliably identified.

Microchips are easy to implant and only need a routine consultation. If you need your pet microchipped or have any questions please don't hesitate to ask a member of staff.

Keeping your pet healthy in 2018!

As the weather warms up, we've put together some top tips to help you keep your pets happy and healthy!

Vital vaccinations: It is very important to keep up with your pet's annual vaccinations. The diseases we vaccinate against can cause life-threatening illnesses to your pets, and in the case of Leptospirosis also pose a significant human health risk.

Vaccines in **dogs** usually protect against Parvovirus, Distemper, Hepatitis and Leptospirosis. In **cats** we protect against Feline Calici Virus, Herpes, Panleucopaenia and Feline Leukaemia Virus.

Another really important part of the vaccine visit is an **annual health check**. A nose to tail examination allows us to pick up *early* signs of issues such as dental decay, heart disease, ear and eye problems, moderate weight gain and much more!

Parasite alert! As the weather warms up, parasites become more and more of an issue. Key amongst these are fleas and ticks! **Fleas** love the warmer weather and dormant eggs from last year will rapidly hatch out into adult fleas, hopping on to passing pets and bringing these tiny pests back to your home.

Ticks are another seasonal problem and can be found in areas of woodland, heathland and grassland. Here they wait for an animal or human to brush past them so that they can jump on their new host and feed. They attach using their mouth parts and will feed off blood from their host for several days before finally dropping off. Ticks can transmit a range of infectious diseases (see box).

Tick borne disease alert!

Parting the coat reveals a tick in situ with buried mouth parts.

Ticks can transmit a range of infectious diseases. **Lyme disease** is widespread across the UK and Ireland and spread by the sheep tick – *Ixodes ricinus* It is caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* and can cause recurrent lameness due to inflammation of the joints. Humans can also suffer from Lyme disease. **Babesiosis** is an emerging disease in the UK and is caused by a tiny tick borne parasite – *Babesia canis* which infects red blood cells, causing anaemia, dark red urine, pale gums, lethargy and fever.

Photo: Warren Photographic

The good news is that we have a range of products that will rapidly kill or repel fleas and ticks. In addition we can also advise on other pet health topics such as **diets and feeding**, **dental care**, **pet insurance** and much more! Please contact us for more information or to book an appointment!

Don't get hacked off with Kennel Cough!

Did you know that Kennel Cough is a highly contagious cough that doesn't just develop from being in kennels? It can in fact be caught anywhere dogs meet – out on walks, at the beach, training classes, dog shows and of course boarding kennels! It can be transmitted through the air, on objects that have been in contact with an affected animal, and also by direct nose-to-nose transmission.

The condition can involve several infectious agents including viruses and a bacteria – *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Younger animals are particularly vulnerable, and any pet that is going into kennels or dog training classes may be at greater risk. The symptoms commonly involve a harsh "honking" cough with white phlegm that is often coughed up, a high temperature and a sore throat. It can progress to nasal discharge, breathlessness, a loss of appetite and lethargy. Affected pets may cough for weeks and some will require anti-inflammatories to reduce the cough or even antibiotics if a bacterial infection develops.

To make sure your pet is protected, an intranasal kennel cough vaccine is available to reduce the risk of developing the disease and reduce clinical signs. This is given as an addition to your pet's standard vaccines. Please call us at the surgery for further information!

Gorgeous guinea pigs!

Guinea pigs make excellent pets since they are easy to handle, are very inquisitive, rarely bite and can be very 'chatty', communicating with a range of sounds. There are different breeds of guinea pigs with many varieties of coat types, length and colour.

Guinea pigs are sociable animals and should be kept in groups or pairs; males reach sexual maturity at 9-10 weeks, females even earlier at 4-6 weeks so it is essential that the male, at least, is neutered to prevent unwanted pregnancy. Housing guinea pigs with rabbits is not recommended due to different nutritional requirements between the species, the risk of disease transmission and the risk of rabbits bullying guinea pigs.

Housing should be away from draughts, kept out of direct sunlight and guinea pigs housed outside must have access to shade. Housing should be as large as possible, with the enclosure being 1.2 x 0.6m, or larger (for each pair of guinea pigs), with permanent access to a 2 x 1.5m run.

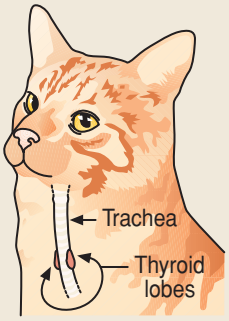
Regular opportunities to graze and exercise are essential. Also, the run should be secure and prevent predators (dogs, cats, birds of prey) from entering the enclosure. Shelters should be provided to allow areas to hide, provide enrichment and help them feel secure (boxes or pipes). Owners should also provide branches from untreated apple trees, willow or poplar to gnaw on. Please note that branches from cherry, plum, cedar, walnut and oleander are poisonous.

Guinea pigs require a high fibre diet, and grass hay must be available at all times. Guinea pigs also need approximately one quarter of a cup per adult guinea pig of a commercial pelleted diet, plus leafy green foods to provide vitamin C and other nutrients.

Guinea pigs instinctively hide any signs of pain and illness, therefore it is important to check them at least once a day. If appetite decreases and/or droppings become smaller and less frequent, or are not produced, then this is deemed as an emergency. Guinea pigs can get dental disease (overgrowth of incisors and cheek teeth) and gastrointestinal stasis as a result of an inappropriate diet or as a sequel to pain or an underlying illness. Nail overgrowth is also common in guinea pigs, especially in animals housed indoors. Guinea pigs are also prone to mites which can cause intense itching, crusting and scaling of the skin and hair loss.

We are here to help, so if you have any questions regarding your guinea pigs, give us a call today.

Thyroid problems – is your pet affected?



Most of us have heard of the thyroid gland, but did you know that thyroid problems are surprisingly common in pets? The thyroid glands consist of two lobes, located on either side of the trachea (windpipe) in your pet's neck (see diagram). Usually they are not noticeable and can't be easily felt through the skin.

The thyroid gland produces thyroid hormone which regulates your pet's metabolic rate. Too much thyroid hormone (hyperthyroidism) speeds up the body's metabolism, whilst too little (hypothyroidism) slows it down.

Hyperthyroidism is a common condition in older cats. Most frequently they develop a benign growth (or goitre), which produces excess thyroid hormone. The symptoms of this include rapid weight loss despite a ravenous appetite, hyperactivity, drinking excessively and gastrointestinal signs such as sickness and diarrhoea. When the thyroid level is too high, it also puts pressure on the other body organs with associated high blood pressure, heart disease and kidney damage.

Diagnosis is usually based on clinical signs and a blood test. Once thyroid disease is diagnosed, medication can be started to allow your pet to put on weight and reduce the adverse clinical signs. Other treatment options include special diets, surgery to remove the affected glands and radioactive iodine at a specialist centre.

Hypothyroidism: Dogs can sometimes develop an under-active thyroid and some breeds may be more prone to hypothyroidism. Lowered production of thyroid hormone leads to a decrease in the metabolic rate, usually leading to weight gain (with no increased appetite) and generalised lethargy. Other signs often include coat problems, and recurrent skin and ear infections.

Diagnosis of hypothyroidism can be more tricky, but in confirmed cases, daily treatment with oral thyroid supplements can be very successful in treating this condition.

Once on treatment your pet may require monitoring blood tests and weight checks to make sure they are doing well. If you notice any of the symptoms in your pet, or if you are concerned your pet may be suffering from thyroid disease, please call us to make an appointment to examine your pet.

Don't ignore lumps and bumps!

Lumps and bumps can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. If you notice a lump (also called a mass or growth) on your pet, it is important to make an appointment so we can check it.

If your pet does develop a lump, there are several underlying causes including: allergic reactions (such as an insect bite), abscesses (very common in cats), hernias (often seen in younger pets) and tumours. Tumours are understandably the most worrying and are either *benign* – which tend to be slow growing and remain in one place, or *malignant* – which can be fast growing, invade the surrounding tissue and have the potential to spread to other parts of the body.

Skin lump on a dog

Skin lump on a cat

Lumps may vary considerably in appearance. Some are fairly obvious (such as the photos above), whilst others are much harder to detect.

If you do find a lump on your pet, it is very important that we examine it as soon as possible. Speed is of the essence and a delay in appropriate treatment can be the difference between a small mass that is easily treatable and one that is far more difficult to treat.

Routinely grooming your pet is a great way to keep an eye out for lumps, bumps, ticks and any other problems. Just give us a call if you find anything unusual.

Grooming cat photo: Warren Photographic

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