



## Booster Alert!

Did you know vaccinations can help to protect your pet against a range of potentially life threatening infectious diseases?

Puppies, kittens and rabbits will require a course of vaccines as young pets, followed by regular booster vaccinations throughout their lives.

**Cats:** We recommend vaccinating cats against Cat flu, Feline Leukaemia and Feline Enteritis.

Cat Flu is spread by airborne virus droplets, so even house cats are at risk. Signs include runny noses, sneezing and sore eyes.

Feline Leukaemia (FeLV) is transmitted through cat fights and direct cat to cat contact. FeLV is usually fatal, typically within a couple of years of contracting the virus.

Feline Enteritis is thankfully rare, mainly due to vaccination.

**Dogs** should be vaccinated against a range of infectious diseases. One is parvovirus which can cause a fatal diarrhoea, especially in young animals. We also vaccinate against Distemper, Hepatitis, and Leptospirosis.

We can also protect dogs against Kennel Cough, which although less serious, is highly infectious. The length of protection for each disease varies, so what we vaccinate against will change annually.

**Rabbits** should be vaccinated against Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (which exists in two strains RVHD1 and RVHD2). All three of these viruses are frequently deadly, and often occur with very little warning.

So – as you can see, vaccines are really vital! The vaccine visit is also a great opportunity for us to give your pet a nose to tail check and also for you to ask us about any pet related health issues. If your pet's boosters are out of date, please call us today for an appointment!

## Should I have my pet neutered?



One of the many decisions facing pet owners is that of neutering. The good news is that apart from preventing unwanted pregnancies, there are several other benefits to having pets neutered as outlined below. Neutered pets are likely to live longer, healthier lives thanks to surgical procedures which are safe, quick and relatively painless.

**Dogs:** Un-neutered female dogs typically come into season twice a year. Their vulva will become prominent, they will be more attractive to male dogs and can have light or heavy bleeding for up to three weeks. In this time they need to be walked away from other dogs and kept on the lead. Both sexes are prone to roam in an effort to mate, with the associated risks of becoming permanently lost or injured whilst roaming. In addition to avoiding further seasons, spaying your female pet will reduce her chances of mammary cancer later in life and prevents a life threatening condition called a pyometra. This causes a pus filled uterus which sometimes needs emergency surgery.

Un-neutered male dogs may be less easy to recall when off the lead, urine mark their territory, or show excessive sexual behaviours. Castrating them reduces the risk of some prostatic disease later in life and removes the risk of testicular cancer.



**Cats** can be neutered at an early age, usually before sexual maturity. Your female cat typically comes into season every three weeks making pregnancy a strong possibility. When she is in season (or on heat) she will become vocal and want to go outside. This can happen as early as six months of age! Male cats who are not castrated are more likely to roam, looking for females, increasing their risk of being in car accidents and cat fights. Some cats can spread Feline Leukemia from bites which can be life threatening. Male cats are also more likely to spray strong smelling urine inside the house, marking their territory.

The good news is that there are a range of benefits to neutering your pets! Please contact us if you would like any further information or to get your pet booked in for an operation!



**Rabbits:** Both sexes of rabbits benefit hugely from being neutered. Rabbits are sociable animals and neutering is very important to allow them to live harmoniously in pairs. The best bonded pairs are typically spayed females and castrated males. Neutered rabbits are easier to handle and also less prone to fighting.

## Brrr! In Winter, the fleas don't flee!



Now the weather is colder, it is easy to assume that you don't need to protect your pets against parasites, especially fleas. However, it is actually more important than ever!

In summer, fleas can happily survive outside, especially on wildlife but in the winter it isn't so easy for them, unless they move somewhere that is warm, cosy and has lots of bodies to keep them fed! Remind you of anywhere? Yes, it is your home!

Our centrally heated homes, with plenty of soft furnishings to hide in and pets to feed off, are ideal winter breeding ground for these little biters, so we can't take our eyes off the ball!

We have lots of ways to kill fleas and larvae, including collars, spot-ons and tablets. Some last for up to 6 months and treating all pets in the household. If any family members have small bites or itches on their legs you may need to use a flea control spray in the house. Do not forget to vacuum and wash any fabrics such as bedding on a high heat setting. Have a chat with our team about how to ensure you and your pets don't end up with a winter flea infestation.





## Winter survival guide!

Winter is fast approaching. The weather is getting wetter and colder and your pet may decide to spend more time inside by the fire than running around outside! Here are some things to look out for to keep them in the best of health:

**Sore joints:** Pets with joint problems often start to struggle in the colder weather. Look out for hunching back on walks, stiffness in the mornings or them being reluctant to go out. Many pets will benefit from anti-inflammatory medication and also joint supplements. Arthritic pets often struggle with long walks, so little and often is the key.

**Can you pinch an inch?** With many pets spending more time indoors during the winter months – they are getting less exercise and need correspondingly less food. Keep an eye out for any weight gain since excess weight can cause a range of health problems including heart disease, diabetes and can also significantly worsen arthritis.

**On snowy days** remember to check your pet's paws after walks and give them a good wipe down. Snow balls up painfully between toes, especially on fluffy feet and grit and salt can be very caustic.

**Festive alert:** During the festive season, make sure all your decorations and wires are out of reach of pets since they make very tempting toys! Hide any edible presents (especially chocolate) until the very last minute and resist the temptation to share your seasonal snacks, they will only cause upset tummies. Any cake or pies containing grapes, nuts or raisins must also be avoided! If your pet swallows anything unusual please contact us at once!

**Outdoor pets:** Also don't forget about smaller pets who live outdoors. Make sure rabbits and guinea pigs have well insulated hutches, plenty of bedding to snuggle down in and check their water twice daily to ensure it hasn't frozen.



For further information on any of the topics mentioned in this article, please speak to a member of our team.

## Ear Ear! Watch out for ear disease!



Your pet's ears come in all shapes and sizes and anatomically consist of three major components. The **outer ear** with a large pinna – to gather sound waves, which then pass down the external ear canal to the ear drum where the sound is transmitted as vibrations to the small bones of the **middle ear**, and then onto the **inner ear** where it is turned into electrical signals which are passed onto the brain and perceived as sound.

Most of the time your pet will have clean comfortable ears. You can gently open the ear flap (or pinna) and check the ear looks clean, the skin does not look sore, and check for unusual odours. It is useful to check your pet's ears weekly to pick up an ear problem early. Unlike humans who commonly get *middle ear* infections, the vast majority of ear problems in pets occur in the *external ear canal* – termed *otitis externa*. Signs of otitis externa commonly include ear rubbing, head shaking, and reddened, irritated skin lining the external ear canal. Additionally there is often a discharge which may be foul smelling.

There are several underlying causes of otitis externa:

- **Ear mite** infestations with *Otodectes cynotis* is commonly seen in puppies and kittens and is usually associated with a crusty brown discharge. Rabbits can be infected with the rabbit ear mite – *Psoroptes cuniculi* which is associated with a flakey crusting otitis.
- **Localised allergies** affecting the skin lining the external ear canal are another common cause, leading to scratching, which allows opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections to infect the external ear canal.
- **Grass awns** are another common problem and often present with sudden-onset head shaking.

In order to effectively treat otitis externa it is very important to identify the underlying cause. Some, such as ear mites or foreign bodies are easily identified and treated. However, over time, the underlying cause is commonly obscured and made worse by secondary opportunistic bacterial and fungal infections, and the longer ear problems go on, the harder they are to effectively manage. If you would like any further information or are concerned your pet's ears are causing problems, please bring your pet in for a check-up.



A typical ear in cross section. Most ear problems occur in the external ear canal.



Opening to the vertical ear canal in a cat, with a crusty brown discharge typical of ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*) (inset).



In rabbits, ear mite infestations with the rabbit ear mite (*Psoroptes cuniculi*) present with thick, flakey crusting in the external ear canal.

## Alabama Rot



Alabama Rot is a disease that has been hitting the headlines recently. It has gained attention because it is hard to diagnose but is often fatal. However, it is important to remember that it is also extremely rare.

At the moment, the cause of the condition is unknown. It is often seen in dogs who have recently been walked in muddy areas and there are certain 'hot spots' in the UK and Ireland where it is thought to be commonly found but there are no hard and fast rules.

Typical presenting signs include ulcerated and abnormal lesions on dogs' skin, especially the lower legs, paws and face. It can, in rare cases, cause acute kidney failure by producing multiple small blood clots within the tissue, leading to kidney cell death, which is of course very serious. Fortunately it is still very rare and additionally, most skin lesions will **not** be related to Alabama Rot; however, if you notice any unusual skin patterns on your dog's skin and need any advice, please contact us straight away at the surgery.



Typical photo of a suspected case of Alabama Rot with skin lesions and associated evidence of kidney failure.