



# Letters & Notices

## CORONAVIRUS

### Maintaining routine parasite prevention in lockdown

AMID the Covid-19 outbreak, the veterinary profession is doing an amazing job of continuing pet health care while maintaining staff and client safety. A key aspect of this care is continued routine parasite prevention treatment for cats and dogs, which remains vital as lockdown and social distancing restrictions start to be relaxed. Without these routine preventive measures, flea infestations and worm burdens will increase, which will subsequently lead to an increase in zoonotic parasite exposure risk and pet morbidity.

Both *Bartonella henselae* and *Rickettsia felis* are present in flea populations in the UK<sup>1,2</sup> and present a serious health risk to immunosuppressed individuals who may be forced to self isolate in households with infestations of fleas infected with these species.

In the UK, peak tick activity occurs in spring; however, real-time studies have shown increased tick activity throughout the summer.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, dogs coming into contact with ticks – particularly through increased exercise in rural/peri-urban areas during the lockdown period – will be at a higher risk of tickborne pathogen exposure if they are not protected.

Anecdotal reports to the European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP) UK & Ireland by vets suggest that the number of routine preventive treatments against *Angiostrongylus vasorum* is already being reduced in the current Covid-19 pandemic, and subsequently more cases of angiostrongylosis are being seen.

These examples, alongside the public health importance of routine *Toxocara* preventive treatment, demonstrate the importance of continuing routine parasite prevention treatment for cats and dogs.

A recent UK study has shown that

“**Regular parasite preventive treatments can be provided while minimising person-to-person contact**”

deworming treatments in UK pets are already below that recommended by ESCCAP.<sup>4</sup> Allowing these treatments to drop further could have long-term impacts on human and animal health.

When considering the current social distancing measures, there are numerous ways that regular parasite preventive treatments can be provided while minimising person-to-person contact.

Therefore, ESCCAP UK & Ireland calls on other veterinary organisations to join it in promoting the importance of ongoing routine parasite prevention, and the means of delivering it in a safe fashion at this extremely difficult time.

**Ian Wright**, head of ESCCAP UK & Ireland  
Mount Vets, 1 Harris Street, Fleetwood,  
Lancashire FY7 6QX  
email: hammondia@hotmail.com

#### References

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