

HILLSIDERS 2009

Spring edition

The last few months have seen plethora of problems from rare inherited conditions to an increase in gastric upset in dogs. But of everything, the two problems that stand out are accidental poisoning and lungworm.

Accidental poisoning encompasses the dropped heart pill, unearthing rat bait and sniffing out 'recreational' drugs. It is amazing how often that the dog that can't be tablet-ed will snatch your medication, or break into the bedside cabinet. Dogs can be as much problem as children when it comes to prescription medication.

Most rat bait contains an anti-coagulant. It used to be warfarin but now it may be a second or third generation derivative. This means it is stronger and more persistent, lasting for weeks or months. Initial signs may be breathlessness, coughing or passing dark coloured urine. There may be small haemorrhages or bruises on the gums or belly. Some poisons are brightly coloured and will colour the motions bright blue. Mouse bait appears contain the same poison as rat bait – we have not seen alpha-chloralose poisoning recently.

When walking your dog, please be careful in areas that act as meeting centres for unfocused folk. Cannabis resin is attractive to dogs and the results are unpleasant. It causes intention tremors, ataxia (wobbly), aggression, agitation and barking possibly due to hallucinations, and then depression.

In all these cases vomiting is the immediate first aid. Concentrated salt solution usually does the trick. Then we will deal with the effects of the drug. The only time when you shouldn't make a dog vomit is when the product will do as much harm coming back up such as irritants (kerosene) or abrasives (glass). These are all emergency situations – Please ring the practice immediately.



Lung worm is becoming a problem in this area. It is already endemic in parts of Britain. *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, known as lung worm or French Heartworm, is increasingly being diagnosed. This infection can cause coughing and breathing difficulties; in extreme cases it causes limb swelling, bleeding, gait abnormalities, fever, not eating and collapse. It is caught by dogs eating slugs and snails.

The adult worms lay eggs that hatch in the lungs. These juvenile parasites are then coughed up and swallowed to be passed out of the dog and are ingested by slugs and snails. There they mature a stage. The slugs and snails are eaten by foxes. In the fox it

continues to mature passing through stages as it migrates through the gut wall, liver to the lung blood vessels. It is there, preferably in the pulmonary arteries, that it develops into an adult.

Although young dogs are more likely to become infected, taking the part of the fox in the lifecycle, it has been recorded in 14 year old dogs. Dogs do not need to actively hunt slugs; eating grass with slugs on or even eating frogs will inadvertently infect the dog.

Prevention is better than cure. The easiest way is to use a spot-on effective against lungworm on a monthly basis. This will also protect against fleas, mange and kill other worms. It has some effect against ticks, but is not a repellent. If ticks are a risk then using a spot-on tick preparation, alternating fortnightly will be safe. Tapeworm requires a tablet preparation which is also safe to use with the above.

Spring has arrived. As the days get longer and warmer, it becomes more enjoyable to house train your new puppy. But please be aware that most garden bulbs are toxic to dogs, some fatally so; and puppies love to dig! Beware the claims of slug baits and weed killers – they are being ingested even though they are *pet safe!* Glycophosphates irritate the stomach; metaldehydes kill puppies.

The better weather is also encouraging us to get young dogs out on the scenic walks, but remember those legs are mainly supported by cartilage in the first year, so you've got to do the thinking and restrain both of your enthusiasm and moderate your exercise.

SUN

April also means increasing UV light. From now until October white-eared cats and pink-nosed dogs should be wearing their sun block. Animal friendly lotions are available. And it is not too early for heat stroke in cars!

Hibernated tortoises should be waking up – time to check. If in doubt see our web site www.hillsidevet.co.uk



INSURANCE

Insurance is a frequently asked question. Should I insure my pet? Who with? The first point to make is the Practice is not a brokerage: we cannot advise on individual policies. Insurance is taken out for two reasons: the individual/company you have taken a loan/mortgage with insists or more generally, there is in your opinion a risk of financial loss greater than can be covered by funds held. So, pet insurance. The insurance companies expect one in three policies holders to make a claim. Claims are usually for medical treatment, but may be for damage caused or for loss of the pet. To keep their payout down, to keep the premiums reasonable and affordable, the policies are restricted in various ways.

The main division is between life-time and twelve-month policies. Life-time policies will pay out for a condition for the life of that animal. Typically there will be an excess (an amount that you pay first of the fees) for each condition, and on the annual renewal. There may be an upper limit per condition or per year. There may be a requirement to pay a percentage of the fees when the pet reaches a certain age. Some life-time policies stop at a set age regardless if your pet is still alive. Usually these policies can not be taken out after a certain age.

Twelve-month policies are also taken out for the life time of the pet but only insure against a condition for twelve months. If that condition persists after that time, or recurs, or sometimes a similar condition occurs then that is not covered. These can be frustrating if a minor condition reoccurs as a major condition years later, not to be covered. Because of the more stringent restrictions, these policies usually have lower premiums.

Other differences lie in the scope of cover. Most policies exclude cosmetic dentistry, a lot will exclude scale and polish for gingivitis, some exclude dental extractions and a couple exclude any surgery of the mouth. Prescription diets, complimentary services, alternative medicines and physiotherapy may be excluded.

Health insurance policies will exclude pre-existing conditions: so changing policies may not be easy after an illness. They also exclude preventative medicine and operations such as vaccinations, flea treatment and neutering.

We are happy to have the insurance companies pay us direct except for a few that can take up to 6 months to settle. We must ask you to settle our fees directly and then place a claim with the insurance company. This currently applies to DBI, Sainsbury, Direct Line, Churchill, Tesco and E&L.

When poor manners become a Health and Safety Issue.

The British used to be renowned for their extreme good manners, unfortunately lately this is changing abroad. Worse still we are experiencing poor behaviour at Reception.

It is vital that all animals and people are kept under control at the Practice; and with a bit of courtesy everything will run smoothly, safely and pleasantly for everyone. The car park is an open area. It is not cat proof, dog proof or child proof. Opening a car door and expecting a child or ferret to troop into the waiting room is at best naïve, at worst extremely dangerous as some people still practice racing their cars up the drive.

Animals or people running around the waiting area is unacceptable. Please do not assume every animal, or person is friendly. Ask before you pat anything. Extender leads are not a form of control – they just allow us to follow the lead back to find the owner. Harnesses are good if you wish to perform ‘Peter Pan’ activities; or pull a heavy load. Their place is as a car restraint, not to enable the dog to pull you. By-the-way the scales will cost £1000 to replace.

The staff are well aware of the stress, the emotional turmoil, and the distractions clients are under. We do attempt to anticipate your needs and cater for them.

We will bar anyone that is verbally or physically aggressive to the staff. We will ban any animals that are not kept under control. The staff are tired of being bitten. It is unnecessary. It is painful. It is disfiguring.

So please keep all small pets including cats in secure cages. They may not like it, but it’s better than being eaten. And keep all dogs on a fixed-length lead with the collar adjusted so that you can only get two fingers under it. It won’t choke them: they can’t slip it.

Please help us keep the practice the happy helpful place that we know it is.

