

Babesiosis & Ticks Explained



What is Babesiosis?

Babesiosis is a disease more commonly seen in other European countries but which has recently been diagnosed in a number of dogs in the Harlow, Essex area. It has not previously been reported to occur in the UK in dogs which have not travelled abroad.

Babesiosis is spread by ticks and is caused by a small parasite which infects red blood cells, both directly damaging the cells but also causing the body's own immune system to attack red blood cells. This leads to an anaemia which can potentially be life threatening.

The main mode of infection is through tick bites. Until recently, ticks in the UK were very unlikely to be carrying Babesia, however, with the increase in pet travel since passports were introduced the risks may now be higher.

What are Ticks?

Ticks are temporary blood sucking parasites and can attach to dogs and cats when they come into contact with them outside (from grass and in rural woodland areas). Popular places for ticks to hide are on and in the ears, between toes and in the groin and other skin folds. Regularly examine your pet's coat thoroughly and if a tick is found then it can be most reliably removed using a proprietary tick removal device, which we can provide, and disposed of in a sealed plastic bag.

IXODES RICINUS



DERMANCENTOR RETICULATUS



RHIPICEPHALUS SANGUINEUS



Help protect your dog against ticks



What are the signs of Babesiosis?

The signs of infection are due to the destruction of red blood cells. They can vary from case to case but the main signs are: lethargy, weakness, pale gums, jaundice, red or brown urine and fever. The diagnosis is made by examining the blood under

a microscope or using other specialised laboratory tests to confirm the presence of the parasite.

Treatment

Treatment is based on killing the parasite and stopping the body's immune system from destroying more red blood cells. The disease can be fatal if left untreated. Dogs will need to be hospitalised to give them treatment to kill the Babesia organism and continuous supportive care. A blood transfusion may be required in severe cases.

Prevention

There are no vaccines for Babesia available in the UK. Therefore prevention is paramount and is based on the routine use of anti-tick treatment which will reduce the risks significantly. However, it is important to be vigilant about checking your pet after walks and removing ticks from the coat as soon as they are seen.



Please speak to your vet for further information about preventive treatment and how to remove ticks from your pet's skin.