

BVA written evidence to the House of Lords Select committee for Environment and Climate Change - Pet parasite medication inquiry

About us

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With more than 19,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession.

Overview

1. Parasiticide products are commonly used on cats and dogs to prevent and treat for various parasites, including fleas, ticks and worms. As well as preventing many animal health and welfare problems, these treatments help to prevent human health risks from associated zoonotic threats, and these concerns have led to widespread routine use of parasiticide treatments in the UK.
2. However, there is increasing evidence from multiple sources that some parasiticides are contaminating the environment, including through wastewater from homes, animals entering waterways outdoors, excretion in faeces and urine, and residues in pet fur. As parasiticides can be harmful to a range of non-target species, this can be detrimental to wildlife and ecosystems, which could in turn impact on public health.
3. Given the importance of being able to use these products, we need to ensure they are used responsibly so they continue to remain available and effective in the future, whilst being used in a way that minimises harm to the environment. BVA is calling for a more considered, risk-based approach to the use of small animal parasiticides.
4. Our Voice of the Veterinary Profession Survey showed:
 - 93.5% of respondents were concerned about the environmental impact of small animal parasiticides;
 - 71% agreed that blanket prophylactic parasite treatments are inappropriate;
 - 78% agreed there should be more restrictions on the sale of small animal parasiticides.
5. Read the [BVA, BSAVA and BVZS policy position on responsible use of parasiticides for cats and dogs](#) for further information on the topics discussed below.

Reasons for parasiticide use

Pet health and welfare

6. Ectoparasites such as fleas and ticks can cause a range of animal health and welfare issues, including itching and scratching, skin lesions and secondary infections, immune responses and allergic reactions, anaemia, and disease through transmission of pathogens.
7. There are various types of helminths (worms) which affect cat and dog species in the UK. Some are not of clinical significance most of the time, but others can result in clinical disease and possibly lead to death.
8. There is limited robust information available on the prevalence of common parasites, or the level of risk posed to animal and human health, with current available research being flawed and contradictory. Further independent research is needed to ascertain the true risks, to support vets and pet owners in making accurate risk-based decisions on when to use parasiticides.

Human health

9. Some parasites can pose a potential threat to human health in terms of their zoonotic potential. For example, the tapeworm *Echinococcus granulosus* which affects dogs can lead to hydatid disease in humans, and some species of *Bartonella* which affect cats can also lead to fever, skin lesions, haemolytic anaemia, immunosuppression, lymph node enlargement, and encephalopathy in humans. Zoonotic risks are increased by the fact that owners are often in very close contact with companion animals and share the same living areas, and are particularly dangerous for young, pregnant, elderly and immunosuppressed individuals.

10. Fortunately, whilst some parasites such as ticks and fleas and their resulting diseases appear to be relatively common in animals, prevalence of zoonoses appears to be rare in the UK. However, as most of these diseases and zoonoses are not notifiable and the symptoms in humans are sometimes vague, they are often not tested for, so the true prevalence is difficult to ascertain.
11. It is also important to remember humans can be directly infected by parasites from environmental sources, so prophylactic treatment of pets may not greatly reduce the incidence of some diseases in humans. Robust current estimates, global surveillance, and further research into clinical outcomes are needed to develop our understanding of the risks to human health and better quantify the impacts.

Concerns

Environmental contamination

12. There is increasing evidence from multiple sources that some parasiticide products are contaminating the environment. Whilst most of the evidence for this focuses on products containing imidacloprid and fipronil, other parasiticide products which are less studied may also be reaching the environment. There is evidence to suggest they are reaching rivers through wastewater from homes or other premises where animals are kept^{1,2}, or from animals entering waterways outdoors³. Parasiticide products may also be excreted in urine⁴ and faeces⁵, and therefore deposited in gardens and open spaces, and absorbed into soil. Residues may also be found in pet fur and come into contact with wildlife⁶, for example treated fur may be used by birds to line nests. As parasiticide products can be harmful to a wide range of non-target species⁷, and with even small doses potentially impacting large numbers of invertebrates⁸, this could be highly detrimental to wildlife and ecosystems and in turn could impact on public health.
13. Given the potential adverse environmental impacts, we are calling for a more considered approach to the use of small animal parasiticide products. Everyone must take concerns about the possible environmental impacts of small animal parasiticide products seriously, proactively promoting discussion and highlighting these challenges.

Resistance

14. Use of parasiticide products can lead to resistance developing in the target parasites, which if not checked could have a serious impact on animal welfare. In this respect, parasiticide products differ little from antimicrobials, such as antibiotics, where there is great awareness of the risk of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). In grazing animals, resistance to anthelmintics used to treat endoparasites is serious and increasing⁹.
15. There are currently very few proven cases of treatment failure for modern parasiticide products in cats and dogs due to resistance, but we are aware of some examples, including resistance in Heartworm

¹ Perkins, R., et al. 2020. "Potential Role of Veterinary Flea Products in Widespread Pesticide Contamination of English Rivers." *Science of the Total Environment* 755: 143560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.143560>

² Perkins, R., L. Barron, G. Glauser, M. Whitehead, G. Woodward, and D. Goulson. 2024. "Down-the-Drain Pathways for Fipronil and Imidacloprid Applied as Spot-On Parasiticide to Dogs: Estimating Aquatic Pollution." *Science of the Total Environment* 917: 170175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2024.170175>

³ Yoder, L. E., M. Egli, A. K. Richardson, A. Brooker, R. Perkins, C. T. Collins, and J. Waage. 2024. "Dog Swimming and Ectoparasiticide Water Contamination in Urban Conservation Areas: A Case Study on Hampstead Heath, London." *Science of the Total Environment* 955: 176686. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2024.176686>

⁴ Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) 2023. Summary of Product Characteristics: Bravecto 1,000 mg Chewable Tablets for Large Dogs (>20–40 kg). London: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/productinformationdatabase/files/SPC_Documents/SPC_2158782.PDF

⁵ Berny, P. J., D. Belhadj, B. España, and A. Lécu. 2024. "Fecal Elimination of Fluralaner in Different Carnivore Species after Oral Administration." *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2024.1279844>

⁶ de Montaigu, C. T., G. Glauser, S. Guinchard, and D. Goulson. 2025. "High Prevalence of Veterinary Drugs in Bird's Nests." *Science of the Total Environment* 178439. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2025.178439>

⁷ Pisa, L. W., et al. 2014. "Effects of Neonicotinoids and Fipronil on Non-Target Invertebrates." *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* 22 (1): 68–102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-014-3471-x>

⁸ Yasuda, M., Y. Sakamoto, K. Goka, T. Nagamitsu, and H. Taki. 2017. "Insecticide Susceptibility in Asian Honeybees (*Apis cerana* (Hymenoptera: Apidae)) and Implications for Wild Honeybees in Asia." *Journal of Economic Entomology* 110 (2): 44752. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeet/tox032>

⁹ British Veterinary Association 2025. "Responsible use of parasiticide products in grazing animals." <https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/anthelmintic-resistance-and-responsible-use-in-livestock/>

(*Dirofilaria immitis*) larvae¹⁰, Hookworms (*Ancylostoma caninum*)^{11,12}, *Rhipicephalus* ticks¹³, Whipworm (*Trichuris vulpis*)¹⁴. There have also been reports of treatment failure, especially for fleas¹⁵, but it is challenging to ascertain if this is due to resistance or a compliance issue and reporting of such issues is poor. We welcome the VMD's recent research into owners' use of parasiticides, and look forward to these findings being incorporated into future guidance.

16. We are calling for further research to identify the extent of the threat posed by resistance to common companion animal parasiticides, both in isolation and combination, and encourage vets to report any cases of lack of efficacy or suspected resistance.

Human health

17. Concerns have also been raised about the potential impact of parasiticide products on human health. All veterinary medicines marketed in the UK undergo independent scientific assessment by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) to ensure safety for pets and people, so we currently believe the risk to be low when products are handled correctly. However, we would support further research into the potential impacts on human health, particularly from prolonged exposure.

Current use

18. Use of parasiticides for dogs and cats is recognised to be widespread, but data on volumes and patterns is limited. Estimates for the number of pets in the UK vary but are in the region of 9.66 million dogs and 10.77 million cats, with around 80% of each receiving flea treatment¹⁶.
19. Total sales data from the VMD shows that 27,471 kg of fipronil and 33,036 kg of imidacloprid have been sold as flea treatments since the products were first authorised as veterinary medicines in 1994 and 1997, respectively^{17,18}. VMD sales data in 2017 shows that 4,218kg of imidacloprid and 1,882kg of fipronil was sold in the UK that year¹⁹, although accurate annual sales data for these products over more recent years are not currently available. Additional monitoring from the VMD on sales and usage of parasiticides, in line with that for antimicrobials, would be helpful in understanding the scale of the potential threat to the environment and to measure how usage changes over time.
20. Many topical spot-on products are licensed for monthly or quarterly use, and routine prophylactic parasite treatment is widely recommended by product manufacturers and vets²⁰. However, due to the environmental risks associated with this, members of the profession and scientific community have suggested less frequent treatment intervals may be more appropriate. There are risks on both sides – not treating animals could lead to an animal or public health concern, but the potential harm to the environment must also be taken very seriously. The veterinary profession should show leadership on this issue, challenging the status quo and facilitating informed decision-making on the part of the client.
21. Another concern is the use of combination products and broad-spectrum treatments, designed to treat multiple parasites at once, which can lead to overtreatment and unnecessary treatment. More

¹⁰ ESCCAP. 2025. Guideline 01: Worm Control in Dogs and Cats. 7th ed. Malvern, UK: ESCCAP.

https://www.esccap.org/uploads/docs/vp2qim8y_0778_ESCCAP_GL1_English_2025_v20.pdf

¹¹ Jimenez Castro, P. D., K. Durrenre, S. Durrenre, L. S. Gianechini, J. Collins, K. Dunn, and R. M. Kaplan. 2023. "Multiple Anthelmintic Drug Resistance in Hookworms (*Ancylostoma caninum*) in a Labrador Breeding and Training Kennel in Georgia, USA." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 261 (3): 342–47. <http://doi.org/10.2460/javma.22.08.0377>

¹² D'Ambrosio Fernandes, F., R. Rojas Guerra, A. Segabinazzi Ries, J. Felipetto Cargnelutti, L. A. Sangioni, and F. Silveira Flores Vogel. 2022. "Gastrointestinal Helminths in Dogs: Occurrence, Risk Factors, and Multiple Antiparasitic Drug Resistance." *Parasitology Research* 121 (9): 2579–86. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35867158/>

¹³ Tian, Y., C. E. Taylor, C. C. Lord, and P. E. Kaufman. 2023. "Evidence of Permethrin Resistance and Fipronil Tolerance in *Rhipicephalus sanguineus* s.l. (Acari: Ixodidae) Populations From Florida and California." *Journal of Medical Entomology* 60 (2): 412–16. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jme/tjac185>

¹⁴ Batista, C. L., R. Cabeças, C. Araújo-Paredes, M. A. Pereira, and T. L. Mateus. 2024. "Smells Like Anthelmintic Resistance—Gastrointestinal Prevalence, Burden and Diversity in Dogs from Portugal." *Pathogens* 13 (9): 799. <https://doi.org/10.3390/pathogens13090799>

¹⁵ Rust, M. K. 2016. "Insecticide Resistance in Fleas." *Insects* 7 (10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/insects7010010>

¹⁶ PDSA. 2021. *Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report 2021*. <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/12078/pdsa-paw-report-2021.pdf>

¹⁷ VMD. 2020. Product Information Database. <https://www.vmd.defra.gov.uk/ProductInformationDatabase/Default.aspx>

¹⁸ VMD. 2020b. Freedom of Information Request, August 2020. FOI request submitted 10 August 2021. Reference AT10721

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ ESCCAP. 2022. Guideline 03: Control of Ectoparasites in Dogs and Cats. 7th ed. Malvern, UK: ESCCAP.

https://www.esccap.org/uploads/docs/cgqtpf1_0720_ESCCAP_GL3_English_v19_1p.pdf

narrow spectrum products targeted at individual parasites are required, especially to treat canine lungworm (*A. vasorum*).

Parasite treatment in pet health plans

22. Many animals receive year-round treatment as part of their healthcare plans. We consider that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to pet healthcare plans is no longer appropriate, particularly given the growing imperative to reduce the prophylactic use of parasiticides due to environmental harms and risk of resistance.
23. According to the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons Fees Survey²¹, the average standard consultation fee for a UK veterinary practice was £45 +VAT, and the average prescription fee was £18.75 +VAT in 2024. There are no official statistics for the average cost of Pet Health Care Plans, or the savings this may bring for parasiticide treatment. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) may hold this data, but have not made this publicly available²².
24. In its final report, the CMA highlighted the inclusion of parasiticide products in most Pet Health Care Plans²³ and suggested changes in such plans to reduce the costs of these products to pet owners²⁴. Although the CMA's role is not to comment on responsible prescribing, it does suggest that blanket prescribing is not in the best interests of pet or owner²⁵.

Constraints on veterinary professionals

25. To shift away from routine parasiticide use, a change in mindset of both veterinary professionals, veterinary business owners and animal owners is needed. Veterinary professionals wanting to use parasiticides more responsibly may be presented with challenges within their working environment, such as practice protocols, the prescribing behaviours of team members and neighbouring practices, retaining client trust if there is a shift from vets historically promoting blanket or prophylactic parasiticide use to now advising otherwise, and a need to build client understanding. As new evidence develops, the small animal sector as a whole, which includes pharmaceutical companies and Government agencies, needs to acknowledge the challenges and work together to consider what constitutes responsible use of parasiticides.
26. We are of the view that pet healthcare plans which include the routine use of POM-Vs such as flea treatments and wormers, should only be sold to clients where the vet has carried out a clinical assessment and is prescribing responsibly, as would be the expectation in all other prescribing scenarios. It should not be acceptable for lay members of the veterinary team to promote or sell pet healthcare plans which include POM-Vs. We would also like to see a shift towards new models of pet healthcare plans which focus on tailored check-ups rather than relying on the sale of products.
27. Parasiticide products and the risks of not treating pets are also widely advertised, both to the veterinary profession and general public, which is likely to increase demand for these products. In the large animal sector, VMD currently restrict the advertising of pharmaceutical products to professional keepers, so controls on advertising of companion animal products may need to be considered as part of any effort to reduce the volume of products being used.

Recommendations for action

Risk based-prescribing

28. BVA supports a risk-based approach to use of parasiticides, which includes avoiding blanket treatment and instead tailoring the parasite control to the individual animal, household, and environment. This should take into account animal, human and environmental health risks, in addition to knowledge of the individual's lifestyle or environment and the results of routine

²¹ Farbon, V (2025) "Fees Survey 2025, Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons <https://spvs.org.uk/2025-salary-survey/>

²² CMA Appendix G: Whether LVG pet care plans provide value for money, March 2026
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c3cb19cfd19de13d0f588/Appendix_G_-_Whether_LVG_pet_care_plans_provide_value_for_money_.pdf

²³ CMA Final Report Part A, March 2026.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c2ad1b3ed0546101e0dbe8/Final_decision_report_-_Part_A_24.3.26_.pdf

²⁴ CMA Final Report Part B, March 2026.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c2ad8d13f1436476e44382/Final_decision_report_-_Part_B_24.3.26.pdf

²⁵ *ibid*

examination to look for parasites e.g. faecal examinations for worms. Usage should be appropriate, evidence-based, and monitored.

29. Veterinary businesses should not have blanket treatment policies in place, they must empower individual vets to discuss tailored treatment plans with their clients, and allow for risk assessment within practice health plans so vets can make prescribing decisions accordingly.
30. Recent evidence has shown topical parasiticides may be available for release into the environment for at least 28 days after application²⁶. Therefore, where reasonable and possible, products that are administered topically or through a collar should not be selected if pets swim, are having hydrotherapy, or are bathed.

Improving advice

31. We have been calling on the VMD to reconsider the classification of parasiticides which are currently available through general sale (AVM-GSL), so that they are only available where there is professional advice. We welcomed the VMD's recent call for evidence and strongly support their proposals to review this. Many of those products classified as AVM-GSL are readily available in pet shops, supermarkets and online and can be purchased without professional advice on their suitable usage. Ultimately, subject to confirming a sound evidence-base and situational assessment, we'd like to see these AVM-GSL products reclassified to either NFA-VPS or prescription only (POM-V) to ensure suitable advice can be given by either a Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) or vet.
32. We recognise that restricting access to POM-V only could result in barriers to some pet owners accessing the care they need, but the continued use of the NFA-VPS category would mean products remain accessible and affordable, provided there are sufficient SQPs geographically spread to ensure accessibility. Ideally, we would like to see an expanded role for Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs) in providing advice and parasite treatment products. RVNs are highly valued members of the veterinary team, but few hold the additional SQP status due to the limited number of treatments this would enable them to prescribe. Having a greater number of products available as NFA-VPS may encourage more RVNs to become SQPs, potentially enabling owners to access high quality advice without seeing a vet.
33. In 2023, RCVS changed their [Under Care guidance](#) to require vets to physically examine an animal in order to prescribe POM-V parasiticides. This change is likely to have increased the cost to treatment for some pet owners, potentially encouraging more of them to seek AVM-GSL products without advice. A change to NFA-VPS products would ensure a cost-effective way of providing advice without a veterinary examination being required. These points have also been highlighted by the CMA²⁷.
34. Information provided with veterinary medicines should also be improved to ensure that key points on safe usage are clearly and simply presented, such that it can be easily understood by the general pet-owning public. The data sheets provided with veterinary medicinal products can be very technical and detailed, and it is likely that many owners do not read these.
35. Veterinary professionals also need access to clear, independent information about the products they are using to help make responsible decisions. Current resources include those from [BVA](#), [BSAVA and BVZS](#), and from [Vet Sustain](#), but further research and information is needed to support making risk-based decisions.
36. The training and code of practice for Suitably Qualified Persons (SQPs) should be updated to ensure environmental impacts of companion animal parasiticides are taken into consideration when products are recommended to owners.
37. There has been some work to improve communication with the public in recent years, including from [BVA](#), [NOAH](#) and the [VMD](#), but more work is needed to ensure clear consistent messages reach the public. However, we are concerned that some of this advice does not reflect the most recent evidence. For example, the recent VMD campaign advises owners not to wash their pet or let them swim for just 4 days after application, but clear evidence is now available to show products continue to wash off the skin for at least a month after treatment.

²⁶ Diepens, N. J., *et al.* 2023. "Pet Dogs Transfer Veterinary Medicines to the Environment." *Science of the Total Environment* 858: 159550. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2022.159550>

²⁷ CMA Final Report Part B, March 2026.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69c2ad8d13f1436476e44382/Final_decision_report_-_Part_B_24.3.26.pdf

Environmental risk assessments

38. To support vets in taking a risk-based approach, we have been calling on the VMD to introduce phase II environmental risk assessments for small animal parasiticide products.
39. As part of the licensing process, manufacturers are required to provide detailed information on the environmental impacts of veterinary medicines for use on livestock. Companion animal treatments are currently exempt from this level of scrutiny, on the basis that they are used as individual treatments and usually in much smaller quantities.
40. As parasiticides are used for prevention as well as treatment of companion animals, and they are used widely on an increasingly large population, the quantities are significant enough to warrant this additional level of risk assessment.
41. It is important to note that the European Medicines Agency (EMA) Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use is developing guidance on environmental risk assessment of ectoparasitidal veterinary medicinal products for cats and dogs. Although the UK is no longer part of the EMA, under the announced SPS agreement we expect to be working closely together, and recognise that any divergence in standards could add complexity to this relationship, particularly in Northern Ireland.

Priorities for action

42. We're calling for a more considered, risk-based approach to the use of small animal parasiticides. Everyone must take concerns about the possible environmental impacts seriously, proactively promoting discussion and highlighting these challenges. We set out several priorities for action in our [policy position on responsible use of parasiticides for cats and dogs](#), which are summarised below.
43. Government should focus on:
 - Raising awareness of the issues.
 - Support the VMD proposals to remove parasiticides from general sale.
 - Require VMD to review the requirements for environmental impact assessment of companion animal parasiticide products.
44. The sector needs to:
 - Move away from blanket prescribing. Health plans must allow for individual risk assessment and tailored treatment plans.
 - Improve information provided with veterinary medicines to ensure that key points on safe usage are clearly and simply presented, with support from regulatory bodies.
 - Companies should prioritise the development of a narrow spectrum product for lungworm, as opposed to combination products, to reduce the need for overtreatment.
45. Urgent research gaps to be filled include:
 - Factors that can impact the risk of pets being infected by parasites.
 - Optimal use of parasiticides to control those risks, including frequency of administration.
 - Risks to animal and human health from common parasites, and prevalence in human and animal populations.
 - More research on the prevalence and impacts of all commonly used parasiticide products in the natural environment (in addition to fipronil and imidacloprid), including the impacts of long acting and combination products.
46. All stakeholders should help to provide more education for pet owners on the correct use of parasiticide products, how to prevent animals getting parasites, and how to check for them.