New pet travel rules to come into force in 2012

30 June 2011

Defra has announced that new rules on pet travel will be introduced from 1st January 2012. The changes will mean that the rules on rabies vaccination for entry into the UK will be in line with the rest of Europe.

Defra has carried out a scientific risk assessment to find out how the changes will affect the level of risk of rabies entering the UK. Although the probability of rabies introduction into the UK will increase, the assessment found the risk to still be very low after the increase.

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) and British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) are informing their members of the new rules so that the right advice can be given to pet owners planning to travel abroad with their animals.

Dogs, cats and pet ferrets travelling between the UK and an EU or 'listed' third country from 1 January 2012 must:

- be microchipped
- be vaccinated against rabies
- have waited 21 days after vaccination before entering the UK, EU or listed third country
- have an EU Pet Passport

The current requirement to carry out a blood test followed by a six-month wait before entry into the UK will no longer be required.

From 1st January pets entering from a non-listed third country must pass a blood test 30 days after vaccination followed by a three-month wait.

Until now, the UK, Ireland and three other Member States have had derogations from EU pet travel rules to allow for additional controls to protect against rabies, ticks and tapeworms.

Successful vaccination programmes in wildlife in mainland Europe have now allowed the UK to consider whether the additional controls for rabies are still necessary.

The BVA and BSAVA have continued to lobby in Europe for additional controls to be maintained for tapeworms, which could introduce *Echinococcus multilocularis* to the UK – a significant public health concern.

Although a final decision has not yet been made the European Commission has indicated that it will support the UK case for additional tapeworm controls.

Commenting, Harvey Locke, President of the BVA, said:

“It is vital that any controls on animal movements are proportionate to the risk.

“Due to the highly successful vaccination programme in wildlife in mainland Europe there has been a huge reduction in the incidence in rabies. Research carried out by Defra reveals that the risk of introducing rabies under the new rules is very low.
“However, it is essential that pet owners get good veterinary advice when planning to take their animals abroad because pets can be exposed to a number of diseases not currently endemic in the UK, for example leishmaniasis, babesiosis, and ehrlichiosis.

“As part of responsible ownership we would always advise pet owners to visit their vet for a pre-travel consultation to discuss how to protect the health and welfare of their animals when travelling abroad.”

Andrew Ash, President of the BSAVA, added:

“The Pet Travel Scheme has been highly successful in keeping the UK free of rabies. BVA and BSAVA have been working closely with Defra to ensure that any changes to the pet travel rules do not threaten our disease-free status.

“The rabies vaccine has advanced and now has a longer duration of immunity and we welcome the continuing requirement for all pets to be vaccinated before travel.”