

Veterinary Profession Welcomes Extension of Pet Passport Regulations

Veterinary Ireland, the Organisation representing Vets in Ireland, welcomes the extension of a derogation to the EU pet passport system which it says will give extra protection to Ireland from diseases that imported pets might introduce here. Veterinary Ireland says that this derogation is a safeguard we, in Ireland, MUST keep.

On mainland Europe there is free movement between most EU countries for pets that have 'Pet Passports' showing they have been microchipped and vaccinated against rabies. At the time of the introduction of this Pet Passport scheme Ireland and the UK argued for a derogation - that they needed more stringent regulations to prevent the entry of certain diseases into their countries.

The diseases causing concern were rabies, the tapeworm *Echinococcus multilocularis*, and several tick-borne diseases. Ireland, the UK, Sweden, Finland and Malta did not have and still are clear of these diseases but they are present elsewhere in mainland Europe.

The additional safeguards allowed by the derogation were that pets entering Ireland not only had to be vaccinated against rabies but must also have undergone a blood test to demonstrate they have developed protective anti-bodies. It was also agreed pets could not travel to Ireland until six months after the date of the blood test and pets must receive a tick and tapeworm treatment prior to entry.

This derogation was due to expire next July but due to an intense lobby by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) and Irish vets, the EU have decided to leave the additional safeguards in place until December 2011.

Alan Rossiter of Veterinary Ireland welcomed the extension of the derogation which he said would mean no change to the current system protecting Irish pets. However he has expressed concern that the derogation may lapse in 2012, leaving us open to a much-increased risk of getting these diseases.

"Rabies is the disease that sends shivers down the spine, and so it should – whilst virtually eliminated from the EU, it still kills 55,000 people a year world-wide", he said.

"Whilst of course we must keep this frightening disease out, and will fight to keep appropriate protections in place, we are even more concerned that any relaxation in the current protections will allow the introduction of *Echinococcus multilocularis*, a tapeworm of dogs and cats. Up to 50% of foxes and 20% of pet dogs are infected in parts of Europe. This worm causes no symptoms in animals but causes the disease alveolar echinococcosis in humans, resulting in tumour-like cysts in the brain, liver and lungs. It is fatal in 95% of cases if untreated."

"We don't have this worm and we don't want it. The current simple, cheap and effective requirement to administer a worm tablet prior to entry is entirely proportionate to the risk posed, and must be retained to ensure we don't introduce this worm. The simple fact is that if this requirement is dropped it is inevitable this disease will get into Ireland. Once we have it and it becomes endemic we will never be able to eliminate it. No country has ever eliminated it. The closest was Ruben Island in Japan – they eliminated this tapeworm by killing or removing all dogs and foxes from the island, something we clearly could never do."

"What we now want to achieve is a permanent requirement that pets travelling into Ireland receive a tick and tapeworm treatment prior to import, and Veterinary Ireland is working closely with DAFF to ensure that the EU will introduce such regulations when the existing derogation runs out."

For more information:

Alan Rossiter *mVB*
Veterinary Ireland 01 457 7976

Veterinary Ireland represents veterinary practitioners in private practice and in Central and Local Government. We are happy to provide appropriately qualified and informed persons to contribute further to this debate in a constructive and reasoned manner.

Please contact Veterinary Ireland HQ on [01 457 7976](tel:014577976) or by e-mail at HQ@vetireland.ie