

# Changes to pet travel bring disruption and opportunity

Changes to pet travel rules after the end of the Brexit transition period spell disruption for veterinarians and pet owners, but bring an opportunity for tightening Great Britain's biosecurity. <https://doi.org/10.12968/coan.2021.0007>

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There were many changes to our lives in 2020. One of the largely overlooked aspects of Brexit was the change to pet travel rules, and final arrangements were only announced weeks before the transition period expired.

The UK has been given Part 2 Listed status by the European Union (EU), which means that pet passports are no longer valid for travel to EU countries. However, it does mean that rabies blood tests are not required. Current requirements for dogs, cats and ferrets travelling within the EU and listed non-EU countries are:

- The pet must be microchipped.
- Vaccination against rabies must be done at least 21 days before travel. There is a minimum age of 12 weeks for rabies vaccination.
- A travelling animal must have an animal health certificate (AHC).
- Travel must be with an approved transport company on an authorised route.
- Dogs entering any parts of the UK, Ireland, Finland, Norway or Malta must be treated for tapeworms by a veterinary surgeon with a product containing praziquantel (or equivalent), not less than 24 hours and not more than 120 hours (between 1 and 5 days), before arrival. This now includes pets travelling to Northern Ireland from other parts of the UK.

The AHCs are issued in English and the language of the country in which they will first enter the EU. Travel must take place within 10 days of issue. In a similar way to the pet passport, the AHC must contain details of rabies vaccination, microchipping and, if required, tapeworm treatment. However, unlike a pet passport, a new AHC is required every time a pet travels to the EU and is valid for 4 months for onward travel in the EU or for return to the UK. AHCs will also now be required for travel

from Britain to Northern Ireland, creating a potential pet travel barrier between these parts of the UK for the first time. Each AHC requires a unique identification code and these need to be ordered in advance from the government website GOV.UK website. It is important that veterinary practices are prepared for a sudden rise in pet owners wanting to travel once COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed.

These changes are the greatest made to UK pet travel since rules were relaxed in 2012 and, arguably, since the Pet Travel Scheme's inception. For Official Veterinarians, the changes will inevitably mean more paper work, as an AHC will need to be filled in every time a pet travels. This will increase costs and may be inconvenient for people planning to take their pets abroad, which in turn might impact on the numbers of people travelling and upset clients who are used to taking their pets with them. Some pet owners have holiday homes or relatives abroad and have been able to take pets abroad for long periods with ease. These changes will come as a blow, which is likely to reverberate through veterinary practices.

As well as disruption, these changes represent an opportunity. Great Britain's rules for pets travelling to the UK or being permanently imported are no longer tied to the Pet Travel Scheme. Rabies vaccination and tapeworm treatment are vital to prevent the entry of rabies and *Echinococcus multilocularis* into the country. There are numerous other exotic parasites entering the UK, as a result of pet travel, puppy importation and the rescue of domestic animals from abroad continuously increasing. These include tick-borne pathogens, *Leishmania infantum*, *Dirofilaria repens* (skin worm), *Thelazia callipaeda* (eye worm), and *Brucella* spp. There are currently no other rules in place to reduce the risk posed by these pathogens and there is now the potential to introduce

them. Possible changes could include:

- Increasing the minimum age of entry into the country for puppies and kittens to 6 months, which would have a major impact on illegal puppy and kitten importation because demand is skewed towards younger animals. It would also make it easier for veterinary surgeons to detect whether pets are too young for legal importation.
- Reintroducing the compulsory tick treatment. Although no tick treatment is 100% effective, a compulsory treatment would reduce numbers of ticks on imported pets and highlight the need for tick prevention to pet owners.
- Reducing the tapeworm treatment window, because allowing up to 5 days to travel after the tapeworm treatment allows a window of opportunity for reinfection with *E. multilocularis* to occur.
- Compulsory testing for parasites, which could include testing for heartworm, *Leishmania*, *Brucella* and tick-borne pathogens.

European Scientific Council Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP) UK & Ireland supports the British Veterinary Association, Dogs Trust and other veterinary organisations in calling for tightening of rules for pets entering the UK. However, any changes will come at a price. They will create further inconvenience and expense for clients taking their pets abroad, so education is key to helping them to understand why they are necessary. They will also likely scupper any chance there might be of the UK adopting a Norwegian style pet passport type arrangement or AHCs becoming a thing of the past.

There will always be a trade off between ease of pet movement and biosecurity. This is a pivotal moment for the profession and nation to decide which of these we want to prioritise.