



## *Babesiosis Fact Sheet*

Information for pet owners if your dog has been diagnosed with Babesiosis.

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### **What is babesiosis?**

Babesiosis is a disease caused by a tiny parasite called Babesia that can infect the red blood cells of dogs.

### **How can my dog become infected?**

It is transmitted by a tick called *Dermacentor reticulatus*; it is not the most common tick in the UK but it is present in some areas. In 2015-2016 there were a few cases of Babesiosis in dogs in Essex and a population of infected ticks was identified.

### **What are the clinical signs?**

The parasite destroys red blood cells which leads to some of the symptoms. The signs can vary in severity but most dogs will become acutely ill, develop very pale gums, dark urine and even collapse from severe anaemia.

### **How will my vet make a diagnosis?**

Your vet may be suspicious because of the clinical signs and travel history of your dog (for example, dog imported from an area where the disease is prevalent such as Southern or Eastern European countries). However, as mentioned above, the disease has been diagnosed in dogs that have never travelled outside of the UK. The parasite may be visible in red blood cells under the microscope or your vet may have to send blood samples to the lab to look for the parasite (PCR testing)

### **Is there effective treatment?**

Yes. Treatment will vary depending on the species of Babesia. In the case of Babesia canis (the most common species in Europe) your dog will receive two injections given two weeks apart. It is likely that he will also need additional supportive treatment such as intravenous fluids and blood transfusions. Unfortunately, some dogs with severe clinical signs can die despite treatment

### **How can I prevent infection in my dog?**

Adequate tick prevention is the best form of protection. Follow your vet's advice on the most effective product for your dog. Generally the best products are those that kill the tick soon after attachment and /or have repellent activity. As no product is 100% effective it is good practice to examine your dog regularly for ticks and remove them as soon as they attach. This is particularly important if you walk your dog in areas with ticks eg woodland, areas with deer or cattle, etc. Ticks are most active in warm and humid weather but in sheltered areas they can survive all years round. For this reason, tick control should be carried out all year round and not just in the spring/summer.

### **Can my cat become infected?**

No, in Europe babesiosis is not a clinical problem in cats

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