



Ehrlichiosis Fact Sheet

Information for pet owners about the infectious disease Ehrlichiosis.

What is ehrlichiosis?

This is a disease caused by *Ehrlichia canis*, a bacteria transmitted by ticks. The tick that transmits the bacteria is not indigenous to the UK, although it is able to survive in warm and damp environments (e.g. kennels) here in the UK.

What are the symptoms of ehrlichiosis?

The acute symptoms may be mild and not specific: fever, reduced appetite, enlargement of the lymph nodes, etc. Sometimes, these symptoms will go away without treatment and the dog may remain asymptomatic for months or even years. Then the symptoms will present again and be more severe: e.g. fever, weight loss, bleeding tendencies and other signs that may resemble autoimmune disease.

How is ehrlichiosis diagnosed?

The organism may be visible in samples taken from the lymph nodes, spleen, bone marrow or even blood in some cases. If not visible, more sensitive tests can be done to look for the DNA of the organism in the samples (these tests are called PCR). Your vet may also look for antibodies in your dog's blood against the organism; this may lead to false negative results in early infection (i.e. in the first 1-2 weeks after infection when the dog may not have yet developed antibodies).

Is there treatment for ehrlichiosis?

Yes, a two-week course of doxycycline (antibiotic) given in the acute stages of the disease can resolve the symptoms and, in most cases, clear the organism from the body. In the chronic stage of the disease it is more difficult to eliminate the organism completely. However, your vet can give treatment to deal with the infection and control the symptoms.

Can my dog become infected in the UK and if so, how can I prevent this from happening?

The chances of acquiring ehrlichiosis in the UK are very low. However, it is possible that a dog travelling into the UK from abroad could carry an infected tick which then infects other dogs. The best way to prevent infection is to prevent your dog from being bitten by ticks. Ehrlichia canis gets transmitted to the dog shortly after the tick starts feeding so you should choose a tick preventative product that repels ticks or kills them shortly after attachment. Your vet can advise you on the best product for your dog. It is also important to examine your dogs after walks and remove ticks as soon as they attach. This is especially important if you walk in areas where ticks are abundant (e.g. woodland, areas with deer, foxes, etc).

Can I vaccinate my dog against ehrlichiosis?

No, there is no vaccine against this disease. Tick control is the only way to prevent infection.

Can ehrlichiosis affect humans or other pets in the household e.g. cats?

Ehrlichia canis, which is the main organism causing ehrlichiosis in dogs in Europe, does not affect humans or cats.

Linnaeus Veterinary Limited trading as Davies Veterinary Specialists 01582 883950

©2020 Davies Veterinary Specialists