Winter Tips For Your Pets

Wash their paws

As the weather turns colder, rock salt is often used to help de-ice roads and paths. Unfortunately this can be toxic to our pets. Rock salt is a mixture of salt and grit which easily attaches to pets’ paws and is then licked off. It is very important to remember to wipe your pet’s feet and their fur on their tummy after they have been for a walk or spent time outside. Grit can also be abrasive and damage the skin on their paws.

Beware of antifreeze

Along with rock salt, antifreeze and de-icer is frequently used at this time year. This substance is especially sweet tasting to pets and they will happily ingest it if it is left lying around in containers or accidently leaks from a car. Only the smallest amount is required to cause poisoning which leads to acute kidney failure and in the majority of cases, death in a very short amount of time. Contact your vet immediately.

Don’t let your pets eat snow

Snow might be a novelty but hidden objects or chemicals might be in the snow! Snow can also cause stomach upsets and even hypothermia.

Try not to let your pets walk on ice

Dogs can easily slip and injure themselves on ice. Worse still they might fall into icy water under frozen lakes or canals.

Keep them warm

Older pets with arthritis will feel more discomfort in the cold so make sure they are kept as warm as possible especially when going outside. The smaller the pet, the more likely they are to suffer with the cold weather due to the increased skin surface area to
volume ratio. Make sure your small furries are kept warm and provide extra bedding in their hutches. In the wild, rabbits especially would protect themselves by sheltering in their burrows. Check water bottles daily to ensure they don’t freeze.

---

**Use Of Off-Licence Medicines**

There are certain situations where the best treatment for your pet may require the use of medicines which do not hold an appropriate licence for the species concerned. In this case we might therefore recommend using such a medicine ‘off-licence’ but these will be prescribed in accordance with the cascade.

The cascade is a sequence that all veterinary surgeons must follow when treating animals. For more information visit [The Veterinary Cascade](#).

Each vet must firstly look for:

- alternative medicines that are used in other animal species for the same condition,
- then medicines for different conditions in the same species
- finally medicines authorised for human use

There are a lot of human medicines that are extremely useful in the treatment of pets. Most of these medicines have been in general veterinary use for years, for example anti-histamines, adrenaline, digoxin and diazepam etc. Most of these off-licence medicines are widely used in the veterinary field; there are documented dose rates and they are known to be safe. Our use of off licence medications will be based upon our knowledge of the use in animals and an assessment of the risks and benefits involved. These medicines will only be used when they are indicated and deemed necessary and no licensed alternative exists.
Due to the cost of obtaining a licence for full use in a particular species, there are only a few drugs actually licensed for use in the smaller and exotic pets (e.g. rabbits, birds etc.).

The consent forms we ask you to sign for treatments for your pets gives a current or lifelong agreement for the use of an unlicensed product depending on the situation. If you require further reassurance about our off-licence consent forms please ask to speak to one of our vets.

Please note the following important information

- Any drug dispensed (whether on or off-licence) will be dispensed with instructions for usage and, if applicable, special storage
- Please handle all drugs carefully (particularly if you know yourself to be allergic to some drugs)
- Keep out of the reach of children
- If you have any medication left over we will be happy to dispose of it safely at no cost to you

---

**Veterinary Cascade**

What is the Veterinary Cascade?

The Cascade is a legislative provision in the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2005 (VMR) that allows a veterinary surgeon to prescribe unauthorised medicines that would not otherwise be permitted.

Why would my veterinary surgeon prescribe a cascade drug for my pet?
The principle of the Cascade is that, if there is no suitable veterinary medicine authorised in the UK to treat a condition, the veterinary surgeon responsible for the animal may, in particular to avoid causing unacceptable suffering, treat the animal.

How does the veterinary surgeon decide what cascade drug to use?

In accordance with the following sequence, in descending order of priority:

A veterinary medicine authorised in the UK for use in another animal species or for a different condition in the same species.

If there is no such product, the next option is either-

A medicine authorised in the UK for human use, or

A veterinary medicinal product (VMP) not authorised in the UK but authorised in another Member State (MS) for use in any animal species (in the case of a food-producing animal the medicine must be authorised in a food producing species) in accordance with an import certificate issued by the VMD.

If there is no such product, the last option is a medicine prescribed by the veterinary surgeon responsible for treating the animal and prepared extemporaneously by a veterinary surgeon, a pharmacist or a person holding an appropriate manufacturer’s authorisation. In exceptional circumstances, medicines may be imported from Third countries through the VMD’s import scheme.

Food producing animals


A veterinary surgeon prescribing for, or administrating a medicine to, food-producing animals under the Cascade is required to specify an appropriate withdrawal period to the animal produce. When setting the withdrawal period, a veterinary surgeon must take into account known information about the use of a product on the authorised species when prescribing to another species under the Cascade. Unless the medicine
indicates a withdrawal period for the species concerned, this should not be less than:

- 7 days for eggs and milk

- 28 days for meat from poultry and mammals

- 500 degree days for meat and fish

For more information on the veterinary cascade visit [https://www.gov.uk/the-cascade-prescribing-unauthorised-medicines](https://www.gov.uk/the-cascade-prescribing-unauthorised-medicines)

If you have any concerns over the medication your veterinary surgeon has prescribed for your pet please contact your veterinary surgeon immediately.

---

**Vaccinating Your Cat**

Vaccination offers the most effective way of protecting your cat throughout their life against many of the most serious infectious and fatal diseases.

These include:

- Feline Panleucopenia (also known as Feline Distemper or Feline Infectious Enteritis)
- Cat Flu (also known as Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis)
- Feline Leukaemia (FeLV)
In the first few weeks of life, kittens are normally protected against disease by antibodies (immunity) from their mother’s milk. This decreases over time and has usually disappeared by 12 weeks of age.

Vaccination then protects your kitten against disease. They receive a course of 2 vaccinations, one at 8 weeks of age and then again at 12 weeks to ensure their immune system has the best chance of mounting a strong, protective response.

After 12 months the immunity levels drop and a regular, annual booster is required to maintain the highest possible level of protection against serious disease. This should be continued throughout your cat’s life.

**Feline Panleucopenia**

Feline Panleucopenia is characterised by:

- Severe vomiting
- Anorexia
- Fever
- Death especially in kittens and unborn kittens in an infected cat’s womb

The virus is a very serious disease with a high risk of death in infected kittens and young cats. The virus is very similar to the one that causes parvovirus in dogs. **All unvaccinated cats at any age are at risk.**

Infected cats spread the virus in their urine and faeces. The virus is extremely hardy and persists in the environment for many months or years. Infection can occur by contact with an infected cat or environment or inside the mother’s womb by the virus passing across the placenta from the mother, if she is infected while pregnant.

**Cat Flu**

Cat Flu is characterised by:
• Sneezing
• Nasal discharge
• Conjunctivitis
• Discharge from the eyes
• Loss of appetite
• Fever and depression
• Mouth and eye ulcers and excessive drooling are seen
• Young kittens can have lameness and fever

Cat flu is still extremely common despite the important contribution made by vaccination. Despite it’s name the causes of cat flu are no relation to human influenza. Cat flu is caused by one or more viruses, most commonly Feline Calicivirus and Feline Herpesvirus. Young kittens and elderly cats are at risk from developing severe pneumonia and dying from infection. The viruses are relatively sturdy and can survive in the environment for several days.

Common forms of infection are by direct contact, sneezing and inhaling infected droplets and direct contact with contaminated environment eg clothing and food bowls. Contact with a cat who is a ‘carrier’ of cat flu is also a source of infection. This is a cat which is not showing any signs of the disease but sheds the virus throughout it’s life.
**Feline Leukaemia (FeLV)**

**Feline Leukaemia** is characterised by vague and non-specific signs which can take months or years to develop:

- Off colour
- Poor appetite
- Chronic or recurring problems such as diarrhoea
- Slow to recover from minor infections
- Tumour development
- Anaemia

Feline leukaemia virus is almost always fatal and there is no cure. The infection weakens the immune system causing destruction of white blood cells, leaving your cat open to infection. Anaemia and eventually cancer usually develop.

The virus is spread mainly via saliva for example mutual grooming or sharing food bowls. Also fighting, mating or contact with urine and faeces containing the virus will spread the disease.

**All cats are considered to be at risk especially young cats and kittens.**

The vast majority of cats spend some time outside and are at risk of coming into contact with infection of any one of these diseases either directly or indirectly.

If your cat is a true indoor cat ie does not even venture out into the garden please discuss vaccination with your veterinary surgeon. At your cat’s routine booster vaccination appointment, your vet will also perform a thorough healthcheck to ensure your cat is fit and well. These healthchecks are vital to allow us to spot any problems early on and to offer help with routine healthcare issues.

Useful links:
- **Vaccination and Your Kitten**
- **Vaccinating Your Older Cat**
Vaccinating Your Older Cat

Cats of all ages can and do become serious ill or die from infectious diseases that could have been prevented through vaccination. It is a common misconception that immunity from their primary kitten vaccinations lasts for life or is less important as your cat ages.

Older cats are more prone to disease and as with everything prevention is always better than cure! Their immune systems become less efficient and weakened over time. Infections are picked up more easily and as a result, senior cats may not be able to fight off disease as well as they could when they were younger.

The regular annual visits for a booster vaccination, also allows your vet to perform a full clinical examination and check up. This enables us to spot the early signs of any disease conditions which may be developing. The onset of many of these symptoms are often subtle and easy to miss. For example weight loss, increased thirst or changes in appetite and behaviour can all be closely monitored by regularly attending healthchecks for your older cat. Many diseases and conditions are much better controlled when they are diagnosed early for example renal and dental disease.

At Cinque Ports Vets we offer FREE Senior Clubs which offers you the opportunity to regularly attend check ups with your veterinary nurse. These help you monitor your pet’s health in between their annual or six monthly checks with the vet.

Useful links:
Vaccinating Your Kitten

This information sheet contains advice regarding vaccination of kittens to ensure that they are protected from major diseases.

Your kitten’s first visit to the vet

When you first get your new kitten, your vet will need to perform a health check to make sure that they are fit and well. Your vet will be able to give you advice and discuss vaccination in particular, as well as parasite control, insurance and diet.

When your kitten is 8 weeks old

Your kitten is now old enough to start their vaccination course. Kitten vaccinations are very important to protect against a number of diseases and to limit the spread of diseases in the cat population. Vaccination has been very successful in decreasing the number of animals we see suffering from these diseases. At your kitten’s vaccination appointment you will receive a free kitten pack containing information on how best to care for your kitten.
Your kitten vaccination course

The kitten vaccination course requires two injections: the first at 8 or 9 weeks and then a second injection at 12 weeks of age. These protect against Feline Panleucopenia, Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis (Cat Flu), Calicivirus and Feline Leukaemia. Kittens get some short term immunity to infections from their mother’s first milk (maternally derived antibodies). These antibodies can interfere with their response to vaccination but by 12 weeks of age most kittens will have low enough levels of these antibodies to allow a good immune response to vaccination.

Socialising your kitten

This process usually starts from around 2 weeks of age, when your kitten is still with their mother and they are most responsive up to 7 weeks of age. Therefore it is important to remember that if your kitten has not had the opportunity to be well socialised they may be fearful of new experiences. It is important to regularly play and interact with your kitten.

At home your kitten should only mix with other cats in the house which are fully vaccinated and up to date with their vaccinations. They must stay indoors until at least 7 days after their second vaccination or ideally until they are neutered, between 4-6 months of age. Annual boosters are required to maintain your kitten’s antibody levels and protection against diseases.

We hope you enjoy looking after your new kitten.

Useful links:
Caring For Your Kitten

Ultrasound

Ultrasound scanners use high frequency sound waves to look at tissues within the body. A hand-held probe emits a burst of high frequency sound waves (inaudible to the
human ear) which are echoed back to the probe. These echoes are then converted into a picture which represents a slice through the tissue being examined. This is displayed in a TV screen as a ‘real time’ moving image. More complex functions of the ultrasound machine include Doppler and colour flow mapping which are used to look at blood flow through the heart of other organs.

Most people are familiar with the use of ultrasound for monitoring human pregnancies, and we use it to check for pregnancies too. We also use ultrasound for examining other structures inside the abdomen such as the liver, spleen, kidneys, stomach, intestines, lymph nodes, bladder, prostate and blood vessels.

Ultrasound is very useful for examining the heart (echocardiography). Because ultrasound gives a real-time moving image it can show us the structure of a constantly moving organ such as the heart and tells us about its function.

If your pet needs an ultrasound scan some hair will be clipped and gel applied. Ultrasound is not painful and most animals tolerate it well. Sedation or anaesthesia will sometimes be recommended if your pet is very scared, wriggly or if we are taking biopsy samples.

Depending on the reason for an ultrasound scan, other procedures such as blood samples may be needed as well. Ultrasound is often used in conjunction with radiography (X-rays) as they are both good at showing different things, and together give us a more complete picture. Sometimes we will use ultrasound to help take biopsy samples from abdominal organs. In this case it is used to guide a needle to the area which we want to sample. This is a much less invasive and relatively painless way of taking biopsy samples than surgery.
Pyometra

What is a pyometra?

This is a potentially life threatening condition which requires immediate veterinary treatment.

Pyometra is an infection of the lining of the uterus which often occurs shortly after oestrus (heat or season). Following a normal oestrus, progesterone levels remain increased for 8-10 weeks to prepare the uterus lining for a potential pregnancy. If pregnancy does not happen, the progesterone levels do not return to normal and the lining continues to thicken, forming cysts. These cysts produce fluid which creates the ideal environment for bacteria to develop.

The cervix, which is the entrance to the uterus, usually remains closed unless oestrus is occurring. While the cervix is open, bacteria which normally live in the vagina will enter the uterus. Normally these bacteria won’t survive, but in a thickened uterus with the ideal environment created for bacteria they will thrive. Due to the thickening of the uterus it is also unable to contract fully and expel the bacteria.

Pyometra can occur in any unneutered dog or cat. It is more commonly seen in middle aged to older dogs, although young dogs are also susceptible. It occurs rarely in cats.

Older dogs which have had many oestrus cycles without a pregnancy, have the perfect uterine wall to promote this disease. It usually occurs 4-8 weeks after oestrus.

Clinical signs

These can vary considerably so you should always seek veterinary treatment.
- Lack of appetite
- Increased thirst
- Lethargic
- Temperature

If the cervix is open allowing drainage you will see a pussy, vulval discharge which is usually foul smelling. Your dog will often be continually cleaning her back end. This is called an open pyometra.

If the cervix is closed the pus continues to build up without draining causing the dog to become seriously ill, extremely quickly.

**Diagnosis**

A full clinical examination is performed by your veterinary surgeon. Pyometra is often suspected if the dog is not neutered, drinking more and has a vulval discharge, 4-8 weeks after oestrus. A blood sample may be collected and X-rays or an ultrasound scan may be performed to confirm the diagnosis.

**Treatment**

The most recommended option for treatment is surgery to remove the infected uterus and ovaries- an ovariohysterectomy or spay. Depending on the severity of the infection, your dog may need to be stabilised first using intravenous fluids and antibiotics, prior to surgery. Although the surgery being performed is a neutering operation, the surgery is much more complicated due to the enlarged and weakened uterus. It must be removed without rupturing to prevent the pus from leaking into the abdomen. Additionally there is always an increased anaesthetic risk when the patient is unwell. This is one of the reasons why veterinary surgeons always recommend spaying your dog at an early age when they are young, fit and healthy!

Medical treatment for pyometra is possible using injections containing prostaglandins which reduce the progesterone levels. This causes the cervix to open and expel the pussy contents of the uterus. Medical treatment for pyometra can be expensive especially in large dogs. It is not always effective and surgery may still be necessary.

Medical treatment can be considered for young bitches from whom the owner would like to consider breeding from at subsequent seasons. It can also be considered for older bitches where general anaesthesia and surgery is considered inadvisable.
Your veterinary surgeon will discuss the best course of treatment for your pet. If you do not seek any treatment for your pet suffering from a pyometra the outcome will potentially be fatal.

---

**Pregnancy In Cats**

**Before Breeding**

Before attempting to breed from your pet, there are a number of points which we recommend you consider.

- Can you afford the extra costs involved in maintaining a healthy pregnancy?
- Should complications arise during delivery, could you afford an emergency caesarean section? Do you have the knowledge or experience required to recognise when complications are occurring?
- Can you afford the initial vaccinations, flea and worm treatments that the new arrivals will require?
- Do you have responsible owners who will purchase or rehome the kittens?
- Are you aware that after the costs involved with responsible breeding, there is very little profit to be made with the sale of kittens?
- Is your queen in good health? Does she have any congenital defects? eg. a heart condition
- Is your queen fully vaccinated and up to date with worm and flea treatments?
- Can you afford the conditions that may arise from an entire queen? For example a pyometra (infection of the uterus) is potentially fatal if not treated. If presented with a pyometra your pet will generally require an emergency hysterectomy.

If you feel that the answer is ‘no’ to any of these questions then please reconsider
breeding from your pet.

**Feline Reproduction**

Female cats are ‘polyestrous’ which means that they will come into season periodically throughout the year until they are mated or neutered. Queens in season will be very vocal and they are likely to appear very friendly, overly rubbing around objects and rolling on the floor. As cats are generally allowed to roam freely a queen will very easily attract a ‘tom cat’ and will quickly become pregnant if not kept indoors away from unneutered male cats.

**Pregnancy**

Feline pregnancy can last for approximately 64 to 65 days but timings may be varied as much as 56 to 72 days depending at what stage of your queen’s cycle she was mated.

Signs to look for are:

- Weight gain
- Lack of appetite and vulval discharge (common in the first month)
- Enlargement and reddening of the mammary glands (usually from around day 40)
- On some occasions there is milk production (from day 40)

**Care of the queen during pregnancy**

The queen’s food intake will need to be increased from around day 30, not before as this will only cause unnecessary weight gain. She will need to be fed little and often due to the reduction in the queen’s stomach capacity by the pressure of her uterus. A good quality kitten diet will provide the extra calories she requires. At Cinque Ports Vets we recommend feeding the Royal Canin Vetcare Nutrition range.

You do not need to supplement Vitamin D or Calcium as long as you provide a good quality diet.

Roundworms are transmitted from the mother to her kittens via her milk, therefore it is important to worm your cat to prevent infection of the kittens. The kittens should be wormed from 2 weeks of age and it is important to make sure the mother is wormed at the same time as the kittens until they are weaned.
Prepare a quiet, warm, clean and dry area for the queen to give birth

**Signs of impending labour**

- The rectal temperature of the queen will drop from around 39°C to 37°C. It is good practice to keep a record of her temperature daily in the last week of pregnancy.
- The queen will show signs of restlessness and nest making
- There will be an increase in the discharge from her vulva
- She will have a lack of appetite and may vomit, pant and shiver
- As contractions begin fluid will leak from the vulva (waters breaking)

It can be as little as 10 to 30 minutes from the onset of contractions to birth. Once a kitten has been born the queen will begin to lick and remove the membrane surrounding it. Sometimes with first time mums encouragement may be required. Using a soft clean towel to rub the kittens often helps. The queen should also sever the umbilical cord. If this does not occur you will need to cut it with a clean pair of scissors around an inch from the kittens’ abdomen. Neonates cannot regulate their own temperature so you will need to ensure that mum and kittens are in a warm environment at all times.

After all the kittens are delivered it is normal for a greenish discharge to be present. This should decline after a week.

If you see any of the following things or you are at all concerned you should contact your local branch of Cinque Ports Vets.

- If the queen’s rectal temperature has declined over 48 hours but with no signs of labour
- If the pregnancy is lasting longer than 68 days from mating
- If the queen is straining infrequently and then ceases
- If there has been more than 45 minutes of contractions but no foetus has been delivered
- If there is over a 2 hour interval between the delivery of foetuses
- If a foetus presents with its rear from the vulva but with no hind limbs showing
- If there is a black/green discharge before labour begins

**Care of the queen and her kittens**
After giving birth the queen can be offered a light meal, though she may have eaten the placentas and may have slight gastric discomfort. She will spend the next 2 weeks caring for her kittens constantly. From 3 weeks onwards the kittens will start to wander around and leave their mum for short periods of time to investigate and explore their surroundings.

Click on the video below to find out more about feeding your kitten.