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FVE position on Echinococcus multilocularis in a “one health” perspective

The CALLISTO report stated that five parasitic pathogens were ranked as the overall highest score for human health risks. One of the five parasites were Echinococcus multilocularis. The parasite gives an infection causing alveolar echinococcosis. It is prevalent in central, eastern and northern Europe. In other parts of Europe, countries like UK, Norway, Finland and Malta, the countries are considered Echinococcus free.

The CALLISTO report further recommends that consideration must be given to controlling companion animal movement between areas of the EU endemic for particular zoonosis and areas that are not currently endemic for that disease.

The parasite has an indirect life cycle with mainly foxes and dogs as final hosts, and numerous small rodents and humans as intermediate hosts. The infection in human is serious and may be fatal.

Inter-country and cross border traveling of companion animals provides an opportunity for introduction of this pathogen. Regulation and legislation to control this threat is not good enough in Europe. Many dogs travel within countries and across borders in Europe without any controls.

Regular treatment can reduce the spread and minimize the risk of infection. The effect of treating dogs on a regular basis, will be a reduced amount of Echinococcus multilocularis in the countries that are endemic and lead to a reduction in the countries that have few incidents of the parasite infection. Regular treatment will also lower the risk for introducing the parasite into countries that are Echinococcus free.

Legislation

Countries that are stated Echinococcus free, have an exemption from the EU legislation. When dogs reach the borders of these countries, it is mandatory to have had the dog treated against Echinococcus multilocularis and to have this documented in the European Pet Passport before the dogs can pass the border. However, the EU legislation is not sufficiently evidence-based to minimize the risk for infected animals to cross borders. For countries that are not Echinococcus free, there is no legislation for mandatory treatment.

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FVE recommends:

- Look into and provide new legislation for treatment in countries where echinococcosis is endemic. It has to be based on endemic presence and risk.
- Aim to establish legislation that gives countries free of Echinococcus the right to employ certain control measures to restrict and prohibit import of dogs from endemic areas.
- Compulsory treatment of all dogs traveling from endemic parts of Europe even if they are not crossing any borders.
- For the first choice of treatment against Echinococcus multilocularis, FVE recommends a preparation with only one active substance. This is important in order to reduce the risk of developing medicines resistance and to reduce the overall amount of drugs used in veterinary medicine.
- Veterinarians must document the treatment in a European Pet Passport. The animal must also have identification stated in the same passport.

FVE requests the EU to bring in scientific experts to find the right frequency for treatment for instance ESCCAP (European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites) guideline, so the effect will be good enough to reduce infection pressure all over Europe.

Since responsible dog and cat ownership is important in removing public health concerns, an information strategy should be developed in collaboration between the veterinary and medical profession aimed at the general public, as describes in the ESCCAP guideline 3th edition¹ – July 2017 – Worm Control in dogs and cats.

¹ ESCCAP Worm Control in dogs and cats. 3th edition – July 2017:
https://www.esccap.org/uploads/docs/0x0o7jda_ESCCAP_Guideline_01_Third_Edition_July_2017.pdf