

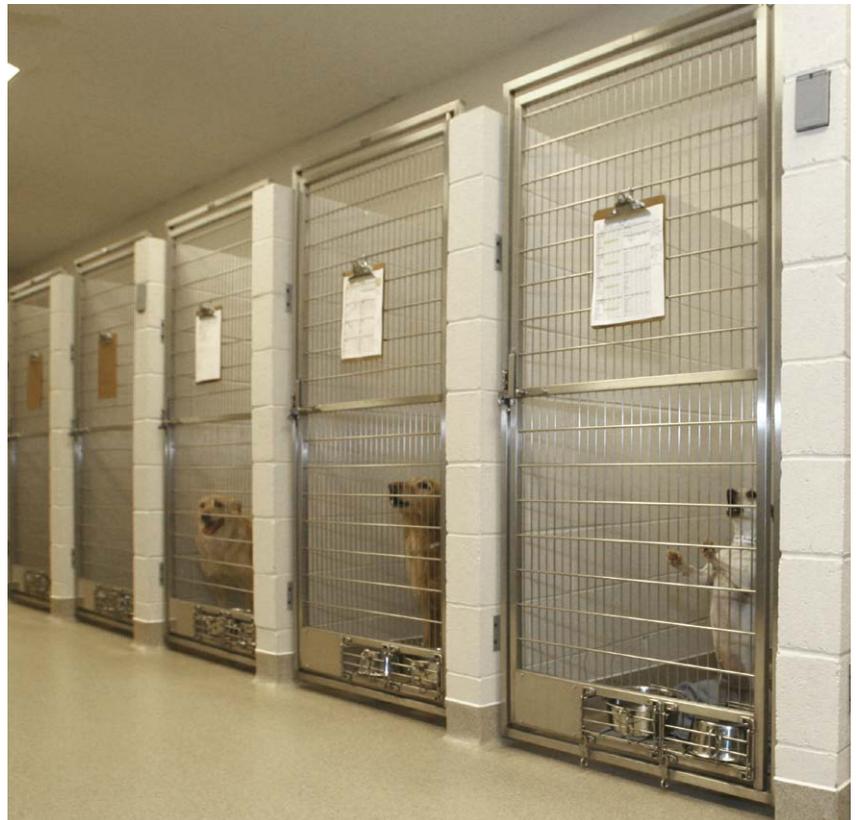
Board Rules

Are your customers looking out for the safety of their patients?

As summer travel plans are set, pet owners across the country are likely pondering the obvious: Do we bring our pet along, or do we board it? Either way, veterinarians should be initiating this discussion with their clients.

Whether it's a matter of motion sickness during long car trips and travel to flea infested areas, or kennel cough and separation anxiety when pets are boarded, there's more to vacations than pet owners may realize. Without the direction of their veterinarian, their pets may be at risk. "Veterinarians generally do an excellent job of discussing these issues when clients bring them up, but many aren't proactive about it," says Nigel Swift, BVetMed, MRCVS, DACVIM, senior associate director, pet professional services, Boehringer-Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc. Traveling with pets involves a lot of planning, he adds. "Many diseases are endemic to certain parts of the United States, and dogs that travel may need additional vaccinations: not just to travel but to visit other parts of the country.

"In general, summer brings problems associated with infections, infestations and activity," he continues. "Dogs traveling with their owners may be taken to regions that have infections, such as Lyme, which they may not experience at home. So, they may not be protected unless they are vaccinated prior to travel. If [a pet owner] lives in Arizona and takes [his or her] dog to Wisconsin or Maine for the summer, it will be exposed to Lyme disease, which many veterinarians in Arizona don't routinely vaccinate for. And, pets are more prone to infections and infestations in the



summer because everything grows better then, including bacteria, viruses, ticks and fleas." Orthopedic issues, such as osteoarthritis, are also more prevalent in the summer, as pets spend more time running outdoors, he adds.

"Conversely, those pets that don't travel may be placed in boarding kennels where they are exposed to large numbers of other dogs or cats," says Swift. "Just like kids going to a new school, the chance of catching an infection their body hasn't seen before, particularly a cough, is very high." Similarly, cats are often exposed to calicivirus from other

cats sneezing, he notes. For these reasons, spring is a great time for veterinarians to encourage their clients to bring in their pets for a wellness checkup.

Francine Daigneault, marketing director, Merck Animal Health, agrees that it's wise for veterinarians to talk to their clients about their travel plans. But, when pet owners only bring in their pet once a year for annual vaccinations, this discussion is less likely to take place, she points out. "[Veterinarians should] discuss the travel destination," she says. "Is the area Lyme endemic or [will there be exposure to] canine flu? What do pet owners need to know to be well prepared for summer?" Another issue is heat stroke. "Cars can become an oven after just a few minutes in a parking lot," she says. Sometimes it makes better sense for pet owners

transmit it. "Ideally, vaccines should be given two weeks prior to exposure to disease, but if people leave it to the last minute, the new oral or intranasal bordatella vaccines offer rapid onset of protection from canine cough," he says.

"All cats should be vaccinated against herpes and calicivirus, panleukopaenia (feline distemper) and feline leukemia virus (FeLV), as well as FIV if they go outside," he continues. "Cats in a cattery setting are at [highest] risk for herpes and calici, and we recommend using a two-strain calicivirus vaccine for the best protection."

Although not every kennel requires dogs to receive canine influenza vaccine (CIV) prior to being boarded, veterinarians should impress on their clients the importance of this immunization. "CIV is the primary [summertime]

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to board their pets, she notes. For instance, cat owners sometimes leave their cats alone for days, thinking they will be fine on their own. "But cats need human contact too."

Vaccines, flea and tick, and more

Sales reps can help ensure their customers address summertime issues with their clients. Vaccines are essential whether or not pets travel. "All dogs should be vaccinated against parvovirus, distemper, adenovirus, parainfluenza, rabies, and four strains of leptospirosis," says Swift. "Parvo survives for many months in the ground, and both rabies and leptospirosis are commonly spread by rural and urban wildlife, so contact with other dogs is not needed to catch these diseases. However, when dogs will be in contact with other dogs, Bordatella vaccine is needed to protect them from canine cough." Veterinarians should remind their clients that although it is sometimes referred to as kennel cough, dogs anywhere can

vaccinate," says Daigneault. "[Dogs] require two doses two to four weeks apart."

Some veterinarians may question how much vaccine they need to stock during summer months. Just as overstocking can result in waste, understocking can result in a loss of business when clients must turn elsewhere to have their needs met. Reps can help their customers evaluate their vaccine use in past years, as well as discuss with them how their patient profile has changed in the last year. Although vaccines generally have a shelf life of a year or so, unless veterinarians have a huge amount of shelf space, experts often advise against purchasing a year's worth of vaccine at once.

Other summertime health issues for reps to focus on with their customers include otitis externa, a manifestation of allergies, and flea and tick. Experts generally recommend that pets receive flea, tick and heartworm preventives

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throughout the year. “You never know when the flea and tick season will start, so it’s best to prevent it year round with monthly applications,” says Daigneault. Still, it’s common for pet owners to forget to purchase or use these products. “If they haven’t seen any flea or ticks, they [may not] feel the need to spend the money,” she says.

“Tick, flea and heartworm preventives are best started before the summer, as it’s much easier to prevent a major problem than to control an infestation once it has occurred,” says Swift. “We have had a mild winter and warm spring [this year], so we are likely to see record numbers of parasites [this summer].”

The discussion

“Veterinarians get busy with the day-to-day details of their clinic, and they will thank their sales reps for helping them be prepared to meet their clients’ needs,” says Swift. “In my experience, boarding is always a good place to start [a discussion] because every vet has clients that board.” He recommends that sales reps begin by asking the following questions:

- “Doctor, how do you help your clients prepare for summer?”
- “What products do you need in order to ensure your patients are well prepared to board at the kennel this summer?”
- “What additional products do you generally use more often in the summer?”
- “Doctor, would you agree that you see more orthopedic injuries in summer?”

Swift recommends that reps refer to a summer product checklist, such as the following:

- Vaccines to prevent infections. Oral bordatella vaccine is effective as a single dose for last-minute clients.
- Tick, flea and heartworm preventives.

- Painkillers and anti-inflammatory medications.
- Antivenin for pets traveling to snake-infested areas.
- Microchips, leashes, collars, cat carriers and portable water bowls for traveling.
- Antihistamines and cortisone for bites, stings and allergies.

In addition, reps can help their veterinarian customers keep current with guidelines provided by such organizations as the Companion Animal Parasite Council (www.capcvet.org) and the American Heartworm Society (www.heartwormsociety.org). Because sales reps generally cover a wide region, they may be aware of certain diseases that are becoming prevalent before those diseases reach a given veterinarian’s patients. In contrast, veterinarians sometimes base their healthcare protocol on their experience with their immediate patients. Literature and other handouts often are helpful to veterinarians, as well as maps that designate where different diseases are most prevalent. And, distributor reps can always bring in their manufacturer partners to provide educational presentations for veterinarian customers and their staff.

Daigneault recommends that sales reps encourage their customers to send out mailers to educate pet owners about traveling with, or boarding, their pets. “Does the clinic write a newsletter about preparing pets for the summer, [including] flea and tick or allergic dermatitis?” she says. “Do they post [this information] on their website or [hang] a poster in the waiting room?” These are points sales reps can follow up with.

Quality, not quantity

Cash-flow-conscious veterinarians likely will resist making bulk purchases and overloading on seasonal products, notes Swift. But, that’s not necessarily bad. What’s important is for reps “to ensure [their customers] have proper inventories to fulfill the needs of their clients.” ■