



# The Changing World of Cat Ownership – What Does it Mean for Feline Parasite Prevention?

Historically, cats have received less attention than dogs in the veterinary setting: they are seen less frequently in clinics, there are fewer feline specific medications and cats are less often the focus of scientific research.

But as cat ownership rises and cats become an even more integral part of families, feline preventative healthcare, including control of endo- and ectoparasites, has never been more important. Tailoring communications to the changing demographic of cat owners and simplifying parasite prevention is vital, especially as pressure in veterinary clinics rises.

## A New Generation of Cat Owners

The pandemic did not just cause a puppy boom – the numbers of new cat owners also soared. In fact, cats now outnumber dogs across European countries, surpassing dogs by a sizeable 30% in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

So why are we not seeing more cats than dogs in veterinary clinics? Cats are masters at hiding pain and have traditionally lived more independently from their owners. There is also a perception that cats are more self-sufficient than dogs, along with the perceived barriers around handling, transporting and medicating cats.

But cat ownership is changing: many new cat owners are younger and more in tune with their cat's healthcare needs, taking a proactive and educated approach. In fact, more than half now see their cat as their family member and place more importance on protecting the bond with their cat.<sup>2</sup> There is more emphasis on training cats to accept handling and veterinary interventions, as well as making practices 'cat friendly' such as through the worldwide Cat Friendly Clinic Scheme from the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM).

Dr. Samantha Taylor, European Veterinary Specialist in Small Animal Internal Medicine and RCVS Recognised Specialist in Feline Medicine in the UK explains: "This new generation of cat owners is often more digitally adept, easier to reach via digital communications and is potentially more likely to engage with remote consultations. Increasingly they want cat-specific information and options. So now is the perfect time for veterinary practices to refresh the way they engage with cat owners about preventative health."

## Reprioritising the Lifestyle Assessment

As well as an increase in the number of cats as pets and a shift in the type of owner, the way that owners interact with cats is also changing. Increasingly owners and cats are living in closer proximity, with more people working from home and many cat owners sharing a bed or bedroom with their pet(s).<sup>3</sup>

Although this increasingly close relationship between pet and owner can have health, emotional and social benefits, cats can expose their owners to a number of zoonotic diseases. This can occur via disease vectors such as ticks and fleas or exposure to parasites with zoonotic potential such as the roundworm, *Toxocara cati* or the tapeworm *Dipylidium caninum*.<sup>4</sup>

It is thought around 65% of cats have contact with children and the elderly, who are at particular risk of zoonotic diseases.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, research suggests that *Toxocara cati* causes severe human disease more frequently than *Toxocara canis*. Inadequate feline parasite prevention represents a potentially significant and likely underestimated health risk.<sup>6</sup>

Cats' lifestyles are also changing. Despite the cultural shifts which have seen cats evolve into companions rather than rural pest controllers, cats have retained their natural behaviour as highly territorial hunters.

Hunting behaviour and outdoor access are risk factors for feline lungworm, which is attracting increased attention. *Aelurostrongylus abstrusus* has been regarded as the most significant respiratory parasite of domestic cats in Europe for some time but epidemiological data now indicates that *Troglostrongylus brevior* is now the second most diagnosed lungworm in domestic cats in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Taylor said: "Conducting a lifestyle assessment to inform parasite prevention regime might not be top of the mind in a short consultation amidst other priorities. But it's useful to remember that situations and lifestyles might have changed for a lot of our clients and many new owners might not have owned a cat before. In fact, research indicates that the majority of cats actually fall into the highest risk group for endoparasitic infection."<sup>8</sup>

## Simplicity – The Key to Compliance?

For such a fundamental aspect of pet care, parasite prevention can be extremely complex – for both vets and owners. There are so many treatment combinations available with varying clinical and lifestyle factors to consider. Ultimately, parasite prevention should be as straightforward as possible for all involved, including the cat.

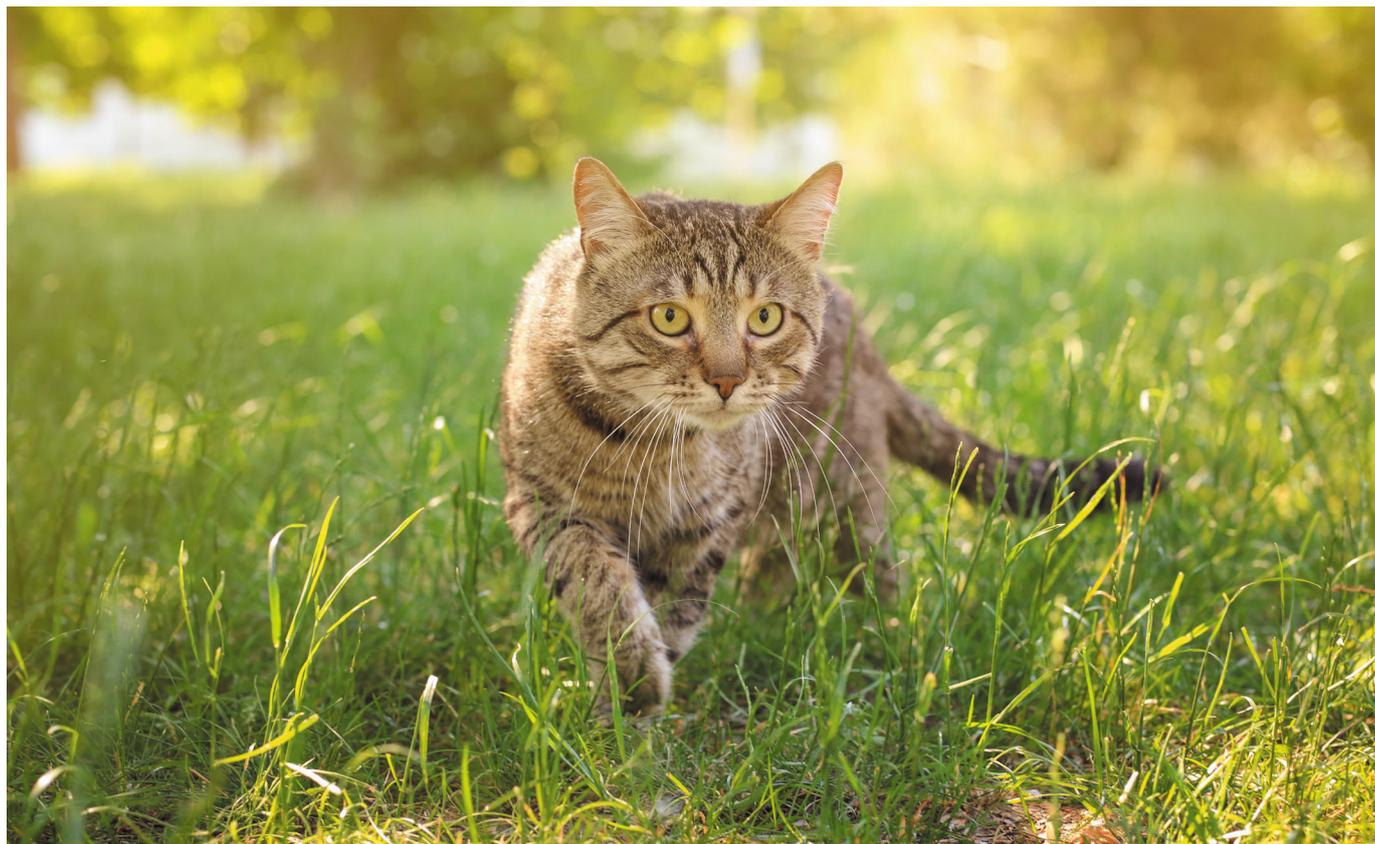
Recent research shows that:

- All owners struggle to deworm their cats at least four times a year as recommended<sup>8</sup>
- 44% have negative feelings about giving parasite protection to cats<sup>2</sup>
- One in eight skip treatment altogether<sup>2</sup>
- 48% want advice from their vet about parasite prevention<sup>2</sup>
- 70% prioritise protection from tapeworms, fleas, ticks, and mites<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Taylor pointed out: "Many cats will have had a break with their parasite prevention during the pandemic, and with a new influx of cat owners it's an important time to boost preventative health practices. The lives of both vets and owners are increasingly busy and both need a simple and effective protocol, especially avoiding complex combinations of medications with different timings."

She continued: "With a three-monthly treatment for example, even the busiest owner can simply think about treating four times a year, at the beginning of each of the four seasons."

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with Felpreva®, a new endectocide and the first spot-on antiparasitic for cats to treat both internal and external parasites, including tapeworms, for up to three months.

Felpreva® has now been granted marketing authorisation by the European Commission, for cats with, or at risk from, mixed parasitic infestations/infections. It is anticipated that Felpreva® will be made available to veterinarians in early 2022.

Felpreva® combines three active ingredients: emodepside and praziquantel (known antiparasitic compounds, also found in the Profender® range) and tigolaner (a novel active substance).

Norbert Mencke, DVM, PhD, Vetoquinol International Medical Veterinary Parasitology added: “Unlike many veterinary treatments, Felpreva® has been designed solely with cats in mind. With its cat-friendly spot-on and three-monthly application, Felpreva® will be a real game changer for veterinarians by reducing prescribing complexity and increasing confidence in owner compliance.

#### Call For Cat Owner Engagement

So, do changes in cat ownership call for a different way for veterinarians to communicate with this new demographic? Dr. Taylor believes it does: “There are now so many ways to connect with customers in a more targeted way, be it digital or face-to-face. And with more feline-focused treatments becoming available, it’s the perfect time for vets to re-start the conversation about parasite prevention with cat owners.”

#### For more information on Felpreva® visit:

<https://ec.europa.eu/health/documents/community-register/html/v277.htm>

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## Vetoquinol

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