



# Preventing Hydatid Disease

Taking action as part of the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy in Wales  
"Healthy animals for a healthy and prosperous Wales"



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

**Hydatid Disease is a dangerous disease of humans. The tapeworm that causes the disease is becoming particularly common in dogs in parts of Wales. This leaflet aims to raise awareness and to help reduce the incidence of the disease.**

## **1 What is Hydatid Disease?**

Hydatid Disease is caused by the *Echinococcus granulosus* tapeworm. Eggs produced by the tapeworm and passed in dog faeces, contaminate the environment and may be picked up by grazing animals or man. The eggs hatch in the intestines and the early stage of the parasite is carried via the blood stream to various parts of the body – liver, lungs, brain etc; where they slowly develop into hydatid cysts. Hydatid cysts can grow quite large and contain many immature tapeworms floating in fluid. These cysts may be seen when sheep/cattle are slaughtered.

If a dog is fed or allowed to scavenge on infected carcasses, young tapeworms released from the cysts grow inside the dog's intestine. These in turn produce more eggs and cause further spread of infection.

## **2 How do humans become infected?**

Humans can pick up infective eggs from the environment contaminated by the faeces of infected dogs. Children and those with weak immune systems are particularly vulnerable. This usually occurs by hand to mouth transfer of eggs after contact with infected dogs. It may also occur following ingestion of food, water or soil which has been contaminated by infected dog faeces.

### 3 How can dogs be prevented from infecting humans?

Dogs can pick up Hydatid cysts by either scavenging on, or by being fed raw infected sheep carcasses or offal. Owners should



ensure that dogs are not allowed to come into contact with dead sheep, and that they are fed on cooked dog food.

All dogs should be wormed regularly. The frequency of worming should be discussed with your vet.

### 4 What are the symptoms of Hydatid Disease in humans?

Cystic Hydatid Disease in humans is a serious condition. Cysts may grow in any site in the body but are commonly found in the lungs, liver, brain or bone. Hydatid cysts grow slowly and may be well tolerated by the infected person but cysts as large as a football have been recorded. Cyst tolerance depends on where in the body they grow.

Unfortunately, surgical removal does not necessarily prevent other cysts growing and causing further problems. Surgery to remove cysts is also specialised and great care has to be taken to prevent the cysts from bursting. Should they burst thousands of immature worms can be released, causing extreme shock. This could be fatal or may result in long term problems if more cysts develop. There are currently no effective drug treatments or vaccines for use in humans.

## 5 What can you do to help prevent Hydatid Disease occurring in your family?

### Dog owners

- Establish a worming programme for your dog in consultation with your veterinary surgeon.
- Do not feed raw offal to your dog and always use cooked foods, to ensure that your dog does not become infected.
- Do not allow your dog to roam, particularly if it could scavenge on sheep carcasses.

### Farmers

- Remove dead animals for correct disposal as soon as possible. Prevent access to dead animals whilst they await disposal/ collection to avoid scavenging by dogs.
- Establish a worming programme for your dogs in consultation with your veterinary surgeon.
- Do not feed raw offal to your dogs and always use cooked foods, to ensure that dogs do not become infected.
- Do not allow dogs to roam, particularly if they could scavenge on sheep carcasses.

### Everyone

- Wash your hands after handling dogs or cleaning their kennels. Do not allow dogs to lick faces, this could allow direct transfer of worm eggs.
- Report dead sheep to the Local Authority.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating.

For further information please visit:

[www.wales.gov.uk/animaldiseases](http://www.wales.gov.uk/animaldiseases)