



Walking dogs in the countryside

Dogs are much loved animals in the UK. Dogs need to be walked daily and taking the dog for a walk in the countryside can help keep both canine and human in shape and provides an opportunity to bond and have fun. However, dog ownership brings with it responsibility and irresponsible dog walking can have negative effects on habitats and wildlife. This Information note raises awareness of the problems caused by dogs in the countryside and offers advice and guidance for dog owners on how to enjoy the countryside with their dog in a responsible manner.

Consequences of irresponsible dog ownership

Not everyone loves dogs. Some people fear dogs and they won't appreciate them running up to them or jumping on them. Their wishes should be respected, and owners should prevent dogs from going up to strangers by keeping their dogs on a lead.

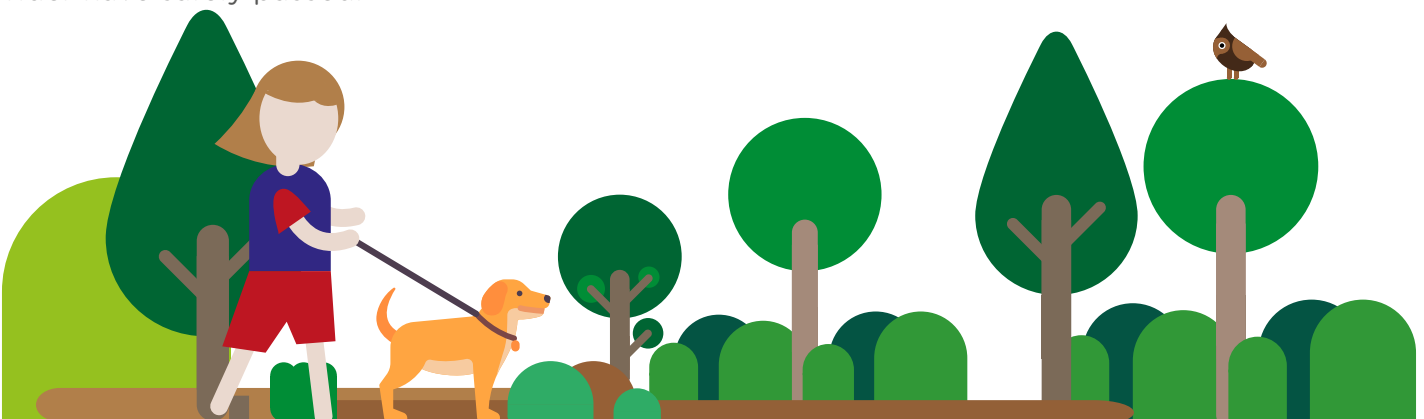
Dogs can chase, worry and injure livestock if not under control

Every year a high number of livestock are killed or injured because of dogs not being under effective control. Many owners are surprised when their dog suddenly gives chase when near livestock as they normally behave well at home or in the park. It is instinctive behaviour for dogs to chase moving objects, particularly other animals or livestock, if one appears unexpectedly or startles and runs. Chasing can stress and worry livestock, leading to exhaustion, injury, miscarriages and abandonment of young. Farmers have the right by law to shoot dogs they believe are worrying their livestock, so being aware of the rules and best practice can help keep both dogs and livestock safe. Further information and guidance is available in [The Dog Walking Code](#).

Dogs can scare horses

Not all dogs are used to seeing horses and they may become frightened or startled when seeing or coming into close contact with a horse. This might become apparent by an over-enthusiastic urge to investigate, bark or give chase. Any or all of these actions could frighten or surprise a horse leading to it bolting or running away which could have potentially fatal injuries to both the horse, rider, dog and anyone else who's in the vicinity.

Dog owners should act responsibly around horses and ensure their dog is put on a lead. They should stand somewhere safe but visible to the horse (so it is not startled) until the horse and rider have safely passed.



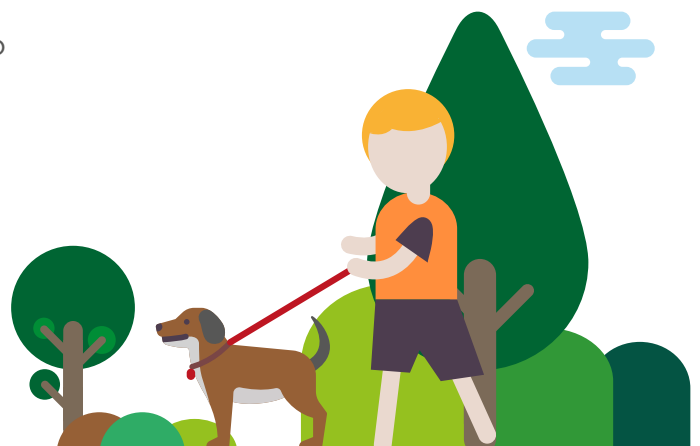


Dogs can disturb ground nesting birds, wildlife and habitats

- **Dogs roaming off the lead or being inquisitive can disturb wildlife.** Dogs can trample on eggs or scare adult birds off the nest, leaving exposed, vulnerable chicks to perish. This can be a particularly devastating problem during the spring when birds and animals are nesting or looking after their young. Many people think that nests are to be found high and safe in the tree canopy, but many birds build their nests on the ground or just above in low bushes.
- **Keeping dogs on a lead is a legal requirement in certain areas.** In some areas Public Space Protection Orders have been issued stating that dogs are either restricted or can only be on leads, for example, in some public parks, nature reserves or on beaches to protect wildlife and habitats and also to reduce dog fouling. On areas of open access land, where there is a freedom to roam on that land, you must have your dog on a short lead between 1st March and 31st July in order to protect ground-nesting birds and at all times near livestock. For information on legal requirements visit [The Dog Walking Code](#).
- **Dogs (and their walkers!) should stick to and follow designated paths.** When out enjoying the countryside. Straying off-path should be avoided to protect plants and wildlife and dogs should be kept under control.
- **Limiting disturbance.** Owners should check the rules before they go. It can be beneficial for visitors to quickly research the dog rules of a location or landowning organisation before heading out into the countryside. People, wildlife, and dogs can all live happy lives if owners are informed and organised before they visit.

Dog poo can cause problems for humans, livestock, habitats and other dogs

- Dog poo has an unpleasant smell and can be horrible to tread in or ride through. While most dog owners are responsible individuals, some do not clean up after their pets. Anyone who fails to clear up after their dog can be issued with a Fixed Penalty Notice of up to £100. If the case goes to court this could cost the owner or person in charge of the animal up to £1,000. The law states that being unaware a dog has fouled or not having a suitable bag is not a reasonable excuse.
- Dog poo increases the nutrient levels of soil as it breaks down. Large amounts of poo left in one area (often by car parks and along paths and tracks) enriches the soil, leading to dominance by a few, competitive species such as nettles, thistles and gorse, which can lead to reduced levels of biodiversity.
- Dogs can carry several parasites in their poo that can affect humans and livestock.





Toxocariasis

An infection caused by a roundworm parasite found in the digestive system of dogs. They can pass out worm eggs in their poo. Both humans and livestock can become infected if poo, sand or soil containing these eggs are ingested. It can cause a range of eye problems, from pain and redness to a risk of blindness. Further information [here](#).

Hydatid disease

Caused by a tapeworm. Eggs are laid by the adult tapeworm in dogs and are passed in dog faeces, contaminated grass or growing vegetables. These eggs are eaten by grazing livestock or humans in contaminated grass, food, water or soil, or after direct contact with animal hosts. Each egg hatches in the intestine of the recipient and the parasite is carried via the blood stream to various parts of the body – particularly to the liver, lungs and sometimes to the brain, where they slowly develop into hydatid cysts (fluid filled sacs). Further information [here](#).

Neosporosis

Caused by the *Neospora caninum* parasite, the disease is thought to be responsible for the highest percentage of all cattle abortions reported in the UK. Dogs can become infected after eating raw meat or the afterbirth of an infected cow. Neospora eggs are produced by infected dogs and excreted in their faeces. Left in fields, cattle will become infected if they eat food or drink water that is contaminated with Neospora eggs. Further information [here](#).

Prevention

Treat dogs regularly with a worming product that kills all canine intestinal worms and parasites. Ensure dog poo is picked up - always carry a poop scoop, a specially designed plastic shovel, or a bag to carry the mess to a bin. Don't let dogs eat carcasses or foetal afterbirth.





Keeping dogs safe when out enjoying the countryside

Heatstroke

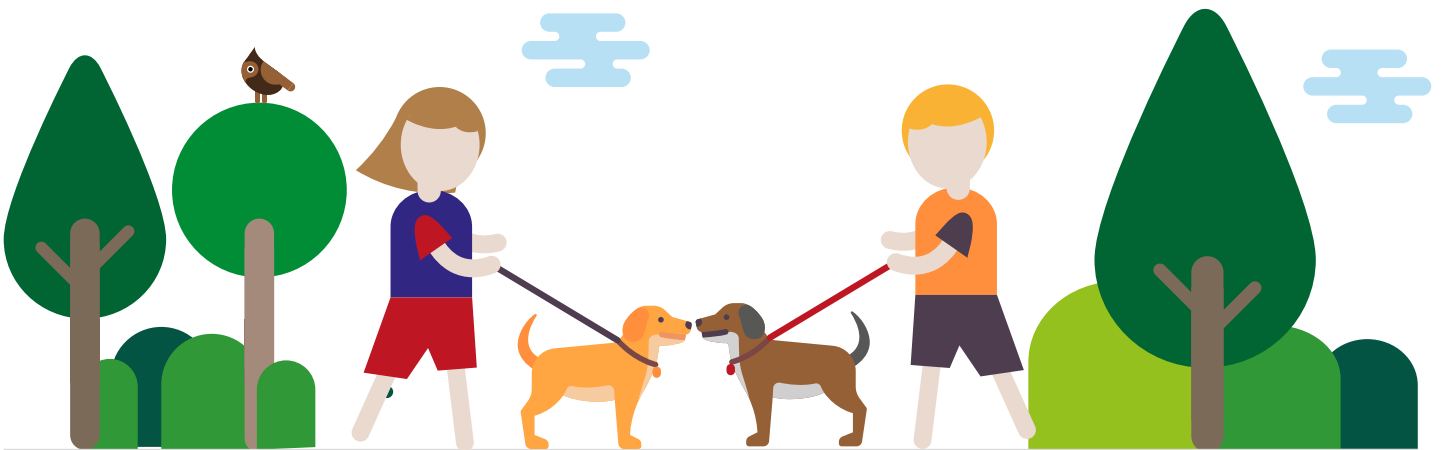
High temperatures can cause heatstroke in dogs which can be fatal. Tips to prevent heat stroke in dogs and guidance on how to spot the symptoms are available [here](#).

Blue-green algae

Many dogs love water and enjoy going for a dip when they see a lake or pond, but dog owners should be aware of blue-green algae which is toxic to dogs and humans. Difficult to identify, it can make dogs seriously unwell and can be fatal. Dogs should be kept on a lead and by their owner's side around water bodies which are known or are suspected to have a blue-green algal bloom, they shouldn't be allowed to swim in or drink from it. Further information is available [here](#).

Ticks

Ticks are blood-sucking, small parasites which can transmit Lyme disease to humans and animals, and from one host to another. Attaching themselves to the coats of passing dogs or humans whilst out on walks, ticks will find a comfortable corner before gorging themselves on blood. Ticks can easily be removed with a tick removing tool and tick preventative treatments are available from veterinary centres. Further information is available [here](#).



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