

Annex 4 - Public Health Wales Advice – 12 April 2022

Dr [redacted: section 40(2)], Public Health Wales:

“This is a problem that is likely to increase in complexity and with a potential long duration. The following are some of the points I have considered in drawing my conclusions.

- To date we (UK) has not seen the expected volume of applications to bring in pets from the Ukraine (UKR) via Poland, the number of applications is likely to increase over the next few weeks and months
- It has been estimated that there are about 5 Million dogs in UKR, of which approximately 1,000 test positive for Rabies annually
- Last Wednesday it was reported that quarantine spaces were available in E&W for 20 dogs and 20 cats and it is unlikely that the UK will be able to meet the potential demand for quarantine facilities in the short to medium term
- There are very few quarantine sites available at ports of entry and I understand no quarantine facilities in Wales at present
- Home isolation is potentially difficult to manage especially for dogs, cats and ferrets
- Home isolation for larger pets is likely to require provision and maintenance of strict biosecurity
- This (home isolation) will need to be preceded by a risk assessment from Defra (VENDU) veterinary advisers rather than private veterinary surgeons (PVS)
- Home isolation is potentially easier to manage for small animals including lizards and other reptiles, rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, rats and birds, all of which are likely to present a lower risk to human health although these animals are more likely to be smuggled in to other accommodation such as hotels, in luggage (as handbag pets).
- Appropriate triage of pets will be required based on risk (dogs & cats cf. birds and rodents) prior to housing in a domestic property
- There will need to be very close liaison and co-operation between all agencies involved (veterinary, public health, environmental health, etc)
- Especially for rabies, there will need to be absolute clarity by those caring for pets in home isolation on recognising behavioural changes by these animals and when to seek medical advice on what are usually considered normal pet (licking) behaviours and a recognition that bites and scratches can become infected for a number of reasons
- It is likely that pet behaviours will change following trauma associated with unusual transport and residence in an unfamiliar environment which is also now highly restricted; these will need to be closely monitored and assessed

- There will need to be clarity on the requirement for veterinary risk assessment if an individual has to go to A&E following unusual exposure to an animal imported from UKR
- Whilst in many cases, home quarantine of about 30 days since leaving UKR would cover the majority of the usual incubation period for rabies, it should be borne in mind that it can be longer, perhaps up to 7 months or even more before the virus can be fatal
- There will be illegal and sometimes mass attempts to import dogs especially by charities using false documentation

It will be impossible for the UK to meet the demand for quarantine facilities and we may have to apply mitigation criteria which include the length of time a pet has been in Poland after an official rabies vaccination before transfer to the UK.

It must be assumed that pets imported from UKR will be housed with their owners in either accommodation part let, ie. with the property owners still in residence, quite possibly with their own pets already present or, in a limited number of circumstances in accommodation wholly occupied by UKR refugees. The conditions for housing pets will be different in the two cases and will require different or additional support measures imposed by APHA.

In summary, I am not in favour of home isolation because of the corresponding complexities involving multiple agencies, not just over-stretched veterinary services, it may however be the only practicable solution in the short term if Wales and the rest of the UK are to accept refugees accompanied by their pets which they consider to be family members.

Allowing pets to be housed in peoples' homes with their refugee owners may have substantial benefits social, therapeutic and mental health of refugees to the extent it could reduce their need to access health and social services.

There will however be additional demands on health services in general (eg. A&E) and public health, for example, linked to risk assessments by virology specialists when someone is licked by an animal brought in from UKR, and sourcing and administration of rabies PEP with subsequent monitoring by the HPT."