

## Insurance

Veterinary medicine has advanced in recent years and many more treatments are now available to vets. It should come as no surprise that these advanced surgical and medical treatments are often expensive. Health insurance may help to eliminate the financial worries about caring for your pet.

In the UK about 1 in every 6 pets are covered by insurance. There are many policies available from those that protect valuable pedigree pets to policies designed for ordinary cats and dogs. Horses and other household pets like rabbits can also be covered. Your veterinary practice may provide the first port of call for further information on Pet Health Insurance.

### Who takes out pet insurance?

One in every three dogs is likely to need major veterinary attention each year (in addition to the annual check-ups and vaccination). Many pet owners choose to take out insurance to cover the cost of veterinary treatment. It is not just valuable pedigree animals that are insured. There are policies for ordinary cats and dogs, as well as horses and other common pets like rabbits.

### What costs are covered by insurance?

The cover provided by different insurance policies varies according to the type of policy required and the cost of the premium. Typically, a policy will pay for the costs of veterinary treatment for illness or accident, as well as for third party liability and accidental damage caused by the animal. Some policies even offer cover for holidays cancelled because your dog needs emergency surgery in the week before the scheduled departure date.

### What is not covered by insurance?

- There is likely to be an excess on the policy so you will pay a small proportion of any veterinary bills.
- Policies are not designed to cover day-to-day maintenance and routine health care. Vaccinations, neutering costs and other routine preventive treatments are also excluded from most policies, as are the costs relating to an animal that becomes pregnant.
- Treatment for diseases that were already present at the time that insurance was taken out will usually not be covered.

### What should I look for in an insurance policy?

- Read insurance documents with care to make sure that you select a policy that will suit you.
- Some policies have a time or cost limit for the treatment of each particular condition. With these there is a danger that your dog will run out of insurance cover if it requires long-term treatment for a chronic problem.
- Make sure that your dog will be **covered for the whole of its life** because animals are more likely to need veterinary treatment as they get older.

Before choosing a policy think about:

- The level of cover you require:
  - Are you prepared to pay a high level of excess in order to reduce premiums.
  - Are you looking for cover to avoid one off large bills (in which case a policy which only covers conditions for a year from diagnosis may be suitable as most costs will be covered early in the diagnosis).
- Whether you require lifetime cover.

- Whether you require additional services from the policy (third-party cover, recovery costs, death benefits).

#### **Finding information on the different policies**

- A good company should pay a genuine claim promptly and with minimum fuss. Personal recommendation is always a good start.
- Most vets are in favour of health insurance but changes in the financial services laws mean that they may not be allowed to give you specific advice on pet health insurance. Visit your local surgery to pick up a selection of leaflets on a number of companies.
- Many insurance companies can be found by searching the internet or browsing the Yellow pages. Contact the companies and ask for details of the cover they provide - most will have a range of policies.

#### **Costs**

The cost of insurance will obviously depend on

- Type of animal insured
- Sort of cover that you required
- Special discounts may be available for pensioners or if you have more than one animal insured

Pet insurance is a competitive market so it pays to shop around, but remember that the cheapest company is not always the best value for money.

#### **Is it worth taking out dog health insurance?**

There is no compulsion to take out pet insurance and it is for you to decide whether it is necessary. Certainly, cost may be a factor. If your dog has health insurance you know that everything will be done to restore them to full health and fitness if they become seriously ill or have an accident. If you are in any doubt it may help to ask a friend who has some experience of insuring their animals.