Autumn is upon us

As the days get shorter there are some considerations we need to make for our pets.

The cooler weather can be tough for our older arthritic pets and we need to think about how to manage them best. There are different treatments available and thought should always be given to comfortable warm bedding. With shorter days it can be hard to fit in the exercise for the younger dog but quality time should be spent each day. You will also feel better after a brisk walk - you just need to rug up well.

It is not a time to become complacent with flea control as most of our pets spend time indoors which is an ideal environment for fleas to continue to breed.

With Easter just around the corner we have included some information in this newsletter about Chocolate toxicity.

If you have a new puppy or are getting one soon then we strongly advise you attend our puppy socialisation course. There is more and more evidence that these early formative weeks are so important in the development of a well balanced dog. Please call Nicole White at the clinic to register for the course.

Beware of the Easter Bunny!

Don't forget to be extra careful and keep any chocolate safe from your four legged friends this Easter.

Dogs are especially good at tracking down this potentially fatal treat even through layers and layers of wrapping.

Why is chocolate so bad for your pet? Chocolate contains theobromine, a chemical similar to caffeine, and can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, hyperactivity and incoordination. In some cases, it can cause death.

Dark Chocolate is the most dangerous as it contains high levels of theobromine, but beware, large amounts of milk chocolate can also be deadly.

As a guide, a 100g block of cooking chocolate can kill a 10kg dog. However it would take nearly 650g of milk chocolate to suffer the same fate. Much smaller amounts will cause the clinical signs described above and can leave your dog feeling very unwell.

If soon enough after ingestion, treatment involves emptying the stomach and supportive therapy.

Even if you only suspect your dog has eaten chocolate, it is best to ring us immediately for advice.

Congratulations

Yes, she's pregnant. Some of you may have recently noticed Kristin is developing a bump. Our Vet Dr Kristin Wolfe will be taking maternity leave in May 2013.

We have a fantastic Vet, Kate Thompson to cover Kristin’s leave. Kate is an experienced vet with local knowledge from growing up on the Mornington Peninsula.
Grass Tetany in Beef Cattle (Hypomagnesemia)

The Grass Tetany Problem
Grass tetany has been the main cause of deaths of adult beef cows on farms in south-eastern Australia over the past 40 years.

Seen mostly in lactating cows in winter and early spring, the disorder is associated with low levels of magnesium in the blood (hypomagnesemia) and cerebrospinal fluid around the brain, and is characterised by nervous signs including initial excitement, bellowing, muscle spasms, tetany, convulsions and sudden death.

The cause is complex, involving animal, nutritional, climatic and management factors. The incidence of grass tetany varies between seasons and locations, affecting up to 2% of cows in an area in bad grass tetany years, and up to 30% of cows in particular herds. Most clinically affected cows die.

Clinical Signs
The first sign may be that cows are found dead in the paddock. Usually, there is froth from the mouth and nose, and the ground is rubbed where the animal’s legs thrashed backwards and forwards (paddling) before she died.

Other cows may show nervous signs when disturbed or being yarded. Initially the cow may walk stiffly, or gallop madly or bellow loudly, before going down and becoming unable to rise. The cow has an exaggerated response to sight, sound or touch, and may begin convulsing, with muscle spasms (tetany), kicking, rolling of the eye-balls, head arched back and frothing at the mouth. Death can occur within half an hour.

Milder cases may show a wild facial expression and exaggerated or unsteady leg movements for 3-4 days, before recovery or the development of more severe signs.

Treatment
Rapid treatment to restore blood magnesium is essential.

Injection of a magnesium solution into the jugular vein produces the best results but can be dangerous and should only be done by a veterinarian. Farmers should only treat affected cows by injection under the skin. Solutions that contain calcium as well as magnesium should be used to guard against possible hypocalcemia.
What is Hendra virus?
Hendra virus is a potentially deadly viral disease that can be spread from horses to humans. There are no known treatments for Hendra virus.

First detected in northern Queensland in 1994, more recently Hendra virus has been reported further south and west of the Great Dividing Range.

Where does Hendra virus come from?
Fruit bats (flying foxes) are the natural hosts of Hendra virus.

How is Hendra virus spread?
It is thought that Hendra virus is transmitted from fruit bat to horse via feed contaminated with fruit bat urine, faeces or body fluids.

Hendra virus can be spread from horse to horse and horse to human through close contact with respiratory secretions and/or blood from an infected horse.

What are the signs of Hendra virus in horses?
- Fever
- Nasal discharge
- Clumsiness or difficulty walking
- Muscle twitching
- Increased breathing rate
- Lack of appetite
- Head tilt
- Difficulty breathing

If you have observed any of these symptoms or you are concerned about your horse, consult your veterinarian immediately.

How do humans catch Hendra virus?
Horse to human transmission can occur if there has been close contact with bodily secretions and/or blood of an infected horse.

Humans may begin to show signs of illness within 5 - 21 days of contact with an infected horse.

What are the signs of Hendra virus in humans?
- Fever
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Encephalitis with headache
- Drowsiness

If you or your horse-handlers experience any of these symptoms following contact with a suspected or confirmed case of Hendra virus, seek medical attention immediately.

How do I minimise the risk of Hendra virus in my horses?
- Talk to your vet about Hendra vaccination
- Protect water and food sources from contamination by flying foxes
- Isolate sick horses from other horses, animals and humans
- Ensure strict hygiene and cleaning practices are used when handling horses

There are currently no known treatments for Hendra virus in horses or humans. Ask us about protection with vaccine.