



Pet Insurance Fact Sheet

More than half of UK households have a pet in residence. Cats seem to be the most popular pets at 8 million with dogs not far behind in number at 6 million. There are about 3500 veterinary practices that specialise in treating every type of animal from horses and cows to ferrets and hamsters.

Veterinary practices are improving their services all the time and as human medicine progresses some of the diagnostic techniques and treatments find their way into veterinary practice. Most practices now have wide ranging facilities such as hospitalisation with general anaesthetic facilities and ultrasound scanning. Treatment costs do not come cheap and repairing broken bones following an accident to a favourite Dalmatian can soon exceed £1,000 or more. This may come as quite a shock and cause a payment problem. It is not surprising therefore that more and more pet owners are taking out insurance policies. Dogs and cats can be insured with most policies costing no more than a few pounds a month.

When To Take Out A Policy

The same rules apply to buying a pet policy as your own health insurance policy - buy it when young and healthy and there are no existing conditions to report. Read the small print carefully and take particular notice of the terms and conditions that will explain what is and what is not covered together with any excess payments that may be required.

What Do You Get For Your Money?

In general, diagnosis and treatment for any accident, injury, or illness, will be covered by the policy. However pre-existing and chronic conditions will almost certainly be excluded or subject to an excess. Understandably any insurance policy with a high claim likelihood has to maintain a careful balance between premium level, excess charges and exclusions for the insurer to remain in business.

As in human medicine a very large number of sophisticated diagnostic tests are available. Some will require the services of a laboratory, for example blood and urine samples to test for the presence of infection, diabetes or metabolic disturbances. X-rays and ultrasound scanning are other commonly used diagnostic procedures. Rapid diagnosis is vitally important in the treatment of any illness and diagnostic tests may have to be carried out at intervals to monitor the success of the treatment or antibiotics being prescribed for an infection.

Cats and dogs stray on to roadways and frequently have to undergo hospitalisation following an accident. X-rays, transfusions and major surgery involving the placement of metal implants, screws and plates to restore the function of shattered bones all require expensive resources. An insurance policy in these circumstances will bring peace of mind.

Rare and unusual conditions such as leukaemia or cancer may have to be referred to a University establishment or specialists for treatment. Advanced cancer diagnosis and treatment can be given, for instance at Cambridge University and the Animal Health Trust at Newmarket.

Third Party Liability

This is an important benefit to protect pet owners against being sued if their pet causes damage or injury. This can be either a dog biting a child or a cat causing a road accident.

Premium Levels

As with most types of insurance premiums will vary according to risk. A valuable pedigree will command a much higher premium than farmyard breeds! Post Codes will also be taken into account and proximity to built up areas of towns and cities.

Exclusions

Routine and preventive care will be excluded together with anything classed as "cosmetic" for example surgery to correct a bite abnormality in a dog. All pre-existing conditions.

Summary

Veterinary insurance has become much more popular in recent years and there are a variety of plans to choose from. The national British Small Animal Veterinary Association endorses the concept of Pet Health Insurance and almost all veterinary practices display Pet Insurance leaflets and actively recommend it. The ongoing progress of veterinary medicine means that costs will continue to rise. An insurance policy is a sensible way in which to begin planning for unforeseen bills that could be very significant