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News Release

Keep your family healthy by protecting your pet from parasites

- Many disease-causing pathogens that are transferable from pets to humans are spread by common parasites, such as fleas and ticks
- Effective parasite protection for pets is more important than ever before as parasites are spreading beyond their 'typical' regions or climates, making zoonotic and vector borne diseases a growing global threat

Leverkusen, December 7, 2017 – Cat and dog ownership has increased globally over the last 5 years, and in many situations, they live in the home and are considered as part of the family. This, and the ubiquitous nature of parasites mean it is inevitable that more pets and their families are also being exposed to unwelcomed pests like fleas, ticks, worms and sandflies, as well as the harmful diseases that they can transmit.

South America and South East Asia have experienced a particular pet boom, with dog ownership increasing in Vietnam by nearly 9.4 per cent and in Brazil by 8 per cent since 2012.¹ South America is now the region with the highest percentage of pet owners in the world.² It is estimated that Chile has more pet dogs per person than any other country in the world.³ Germany leads the cat lovers however, with cat ownership increasing by 11.3 per cent over the past 5 years, now making it the home to nearly 12 million feline citizens.¹

With increasing numbers of pets, there are also more opportunities for parasites to flourish. Common parasites such as fleas, ticks and sandflies act as vectors of pathogens, facilitating the spread of many diseases, sometimes between animals and humans. There are measures that pet owners can take to reduce the risk to their pet of infection with parasites, such as avoiding tick habitats, discouraging their pet from hunting, and removing and disposing of pet faeces quickly and securely. However, some uncontrollable aspects, such as community animals or wildlife can also act as infection

reservoirs of parasites. This means that the correct use of effective parasite protection is now more important than ever before and plays a key role in keeping pets safe.

The specific parasite risk profile for a pet is dependent on various factors, such as climate, housing conditions, access to outdoors, and contact with other pets. As these factors change, the 'typical' habitat of parasites, and the diseases they transmit, can shift too. In Brazil, potentially fatal disease leishmaniasis, which is spread by sandflies and can affect dogs and humans, used to be considered a disease of rural areas. With the rise of large Brazilian cities and associated community dog populations, human cases are now reported mostly in urban areas and the number of cases reported annually has more than doubled in 30 years.⁴

Some parasites, such as ticks, spend the bulk of their life cycle in the environment and their development and survival depend on climate. The effects of global warming on ticks can be seen in a 30-year study conducted in Sweden, which showed a clear expansion of the parasite's distribution range towards northern latitudes.⁵ Climate change means that parasite species previously unseen in some regions might start moving in, along with the diseases that they can carry. This may be accelerated by factors such as the growing trend for people to travel with their pets between countries.

In some instances, the understanding about the role of different parasites as vectors of diseases has changed. For example, cats can harbor infected fleas that carry *Bartonella* bacteria that can be transmitted to a person during a scratch and can cause serious disease. It is only in the last 10-15 years that we have understood that some species of *Bartonella* can also be transmitted by ticks, opening up a whole new area of risk for infection.

Head of Global Veterinary Scientific Affairs for Companion Animal Products, Animal Health at Bayer, Dr Markus Edingloh explains why it is important for pet owners to take action against parasites, "Companion animals offer many benefits and more people than ever before are sharing their lives with dogs and cats. But the factors that influence parasites and the pathogens they can carry are constantly shifting. This means that it is essential for pet owners to know that parasite protection is not optional, and that repelling parasites like ticks and fleas before they have any opportunity to bite and transmit diseases can go a long way towards ensuring the health of a pet, and ultimately, that of the family."

Pet owners are advised to consult their local veterinarian for information and advice on effective parasite protection, which is the best way to ensure the health and well-being of their pet.

1) *Bayer consolidated data from various sources*

2) *GfK Global pet ownership report – June 2016*

https://www.gfk.com/fileadmin/user_upload/country_one_pager/AR/documents/Global-GfK-survey_Pet-Ownership_2016.pdf

3) *Euromonitor Pet Care report – July 2015*

4) *Visceral leishmaniasis in Brazil: rationale and concerns related to reservoir control. GL Werneck. Rev Saude Publica. 2014 Oct; 48(5): 851–856. doi: 10.1590/S0034-8910.20140480056*

5) *Why is tick-borne encephalitis increasing? A review of the key factors causing the increasing incidence of human TBE in Sweden. T.G. Jaenson et al. Parasites Vectors, 5 (2012), p. 184*

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