

Vets explained



Sainsbury's Bank

Vets explained

A veterinary physician, or vet, is somebody who is qualified to treat unwell or injured animals. In the United Kingdom, all qualified vets are registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS).



Contents

Click on a title below to jump straight to that section.

What to look for in a vet

[Finding a vet](#)

[How to register with a vet](#)

[Home visits](#)

Vet services

[Check ups](#)

[Vaccinations and boosters](#)

[Microchipping](#)

Other services from vets

[If you think you need to see a vet urgently](#)

[Vet fees](#)

[Resolving any issues](#)

[Keeping your vet happy](#)

What to look for in a vet

Veterinary practices come in a number of shapes and sizes, ranging from small surgeries to large hospitals. If you're in an area with several to choose from, it might be an idea to visit a few: most will be happy to show you around at an agreed time.

The [British Veterinary Association \(BVA\)](#) suggests you look for:

- A clean, well-maintained practice with good-sized consulting and waiting areas.
- Approachable and friendly staff.
- Signs that the practice is well organised, e.g. clearly displayed consultation times.

You may also want to consider how easy the practice is to visit.

- Can you get to it easily from home? This is especially important for emergencies.
- Is it easy enough to park nearby?
- Are there good bus links to the practice?

Finding a vet

One way of finding a vet is through word of mouth. Friends and family can tell you where they take their pets. You can also check the [RCVS database](#) to find vets all over the UK. Other sites you might like to look at include:

- <http://www.vethelpdirect.com/>
- <http://goodvetguide.co.uk/>

These sites let people post reviews, which might help you when making your choice.



While all vets are highly trained, some also specialise in certain areas including nutritional, dermatological, and behavioural treatments. The RCVS database usually has these listed. You can always talk to any vet about what kind of expertise he or she might have.

Most private vets won't have a catchment area like GP surgeries do, so you can pick the one that feels right for you regardless of where they are. Veterinary hospitals run by charities usually do have a catchment area, and sometimes offer a service to help you find out if you are in their service area. Those that do include:

- [The RSPCA](#)
- [Blue Cross](#)
- [PDSA](#)

How to register with a vet

Once you've found a vet you like, the next step is to register with them. Unlike the NHS, vets don't have a nationwide database with your pet's details. This is why it's important to have all the right information to hand when you register. This includes straightforward things like your name, home address, and phone number as well as details about your pet.

You can visit the surgery in person or some will let you register online. What you'll need will depend on your vet, but it's quite common to be asked for the following:

- Name
- Breed
- Whether your pet has been neutered
- Age
- If your pet has insurance
- If your pet has a microchip
- When your pet was last vaccinated and given worming/flea treatments
- Your previous vet's details



Home visits

Some vets offer home visits, in case you're not able to make it to the surgery. There's usually a call-out fee, so talk to your vet about it if you feel you might want to use this service.

Vet services

Vets treat animals in lots of different ways, from performing surgery to providing pets with medication. You can read about some of the more common services below.

Check ups

Your vet will check your pet's well being and might ask you a few routine questions about your pet's eating and drinking habits and general health. A typical check up might cover the following:

- Weight and body condition to make sure your pet isn't over or underweight.
- Dental care, to see if your pet's teeth need cleaning.
- Fleas, ticks, and worms, and which treatments are best.
- Vaccinations and when you need to book the next one.
- General health, including checking your pet's heart, lungs and coat.

You may also want to ask the vet a few questions relating to neutering or spaying if your pet hasn't been treated for this. What you'll need will depend on your vet, but it's quite common to be asked for the following:

Vaccinations and boosters

Vaccinations can prevent some pets, such as dogs and cats, from being at risk from many infectious diseases. When to visit your vet for a vaccination depends on what kind of pet you have.

Pet:	Typically vaccinated between:	When to get a booster shot:
Dog	8 and 10 weeks old	Every 12 months
Cat	9 and 12 weeks old	Every 12 months

As pets get older their immune systems might not be as strong, so it's important to keep them vaccinated. Speak to your vet for more details on which are best for your pet.

Microchipping

The microchip, which is injected under the skin of your pet is very small, roughly the size of a large grain of rice. The treatment is quick and believed to be relatively painless - although there will be a slight prick when the chip is inserted. Your pet won't feel the chip at all after the treatment.



This is a simple operation that all dog owners in England and Wales will be required by law to have carried out from 6th April 2016 and 1st March 2015 respectively. In Scotland there's no law about microchipping, and has been required in Northern Ireland since 2012. Even if it's not compulsory where you are, microchipping has some benefits you might want to consider.

Each chip has a unique code that is listed in a special database along with your details. If your pet gets lost, this makes it easy to identify and return. If your pet is stolen, having your name stored in the database means you can be identified as the owner.

Some vets and animal charities like the [Blue Cross](#) offer free microchipping. Talk to your vet or nearest centre to find out more.



Other services from vets

Vets might offer a reminder scheme for booster shots. This can take the form of leaflets, reminder cards, text messages or emails.

Your vet may also get in touch to warn of disease risks in your area.

This information is also available at the [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs \(DEFRA\)](#).

If you think you need to see a vet urgently

1. Don't panic.
2. Call your vet. All vets should provide 24-hour services, so keep your vet's emergency contact number handy.
3. If you aren't registered yet or can't get through, call one of your local animal hospitals. See "Finding a vet" for some ideas.

Vet fees

Veterinary surgeries, like all businesses, charge for their services. These costs can vary depending on things like where the vet surgery is, and the treatment your pet requires.

There are a few ways to help with fees. The RSPCA offer a [low-cost vet care](#) option. This is offered to pet owners who need help the most and include services such as neutering, microchipping, and vaccinations. Talk to your local centre to find out more.



Pet insurance may help with the cost of treatment if your pet is injured or becomes ill up to a specified cost. Each policy will offer cover for different things, so do your research. Some providers will offer various levels of cover as well as the option for additional extras so you can choose the cover you think you're most likely to need.

Have a look at the guide to [Sainsbury's Bank vet fees cover](#) for more information on what can be covered by insurance. This can include costs involved in physiotherapy or acupuncture if your vet recommends it.

Resolving any issues

According to the British Veterinary Association (BVA), if you have any concerns about your vet or veterinary practice, you should talk it out with your vet to clear up any misunderstandings. If you're still not satisfied by how much you've been charged, contact the [Financial Ombudsman](#). If it relates to your vet's conduct, contact the [RCVS](#).



To keep on your vet's good side think about:

- Notifying your vet as soon as possible if you can't make your appointment.
- Arriving for appointments in plenty of time.
- Taking your pet in an appropriate carrier when necessary.

- 1) http://www.bva.co.uk/public/documents/Client_leaflet_3_-_choosing_a_practice.pdf
- 2) <http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/find-a-vet/>
- 3) <http://www.vethelpdirect.com/>
- 4) <http://goodvetguide.co.uk/>
- 5) <http://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/yourlocal>
- 6) <http://www.bluecross.org.uk/1714/visit-us.html>
- 7) <http://www.pdsa.org.uk/how-you-can-help/corporate-partnerships/adopt-a-pet-hospital/hospital-finder>
- 8) <http://www.bluecross.org.uk/>
- 9) <http://www.defra.gov.uk/animal-diseases/monitoring/risk-assessments/>
- 10) <http://www.rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/vetcare>
- 11) <http://www.sainsburysbank.co.uk/pet-insurance/veterinary-fees-cover.shtml>
- 12) <http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/>
- 13) <http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/complaints/i-want-to-make-a-complaint/>

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