

Don't get Petfished: Vets and celebrities lead public warnings against 'cruel and opportunist' lockdown pet sellers

Vets, charities and animal-loving celebrities have joined forces with a government campaign to warn prospective pet owners against unknowingly buying puppies, kittens, cats and dogs from unscrupulous sellers amid a rise in demand for pets since lockdown.

An open letter, signed by celebrities including Kirsty Gallacher, Paul O'Grady, Amanda Holden and David Gandy, and supported by charities including Battersea Dogs and Cats Home, the Blue Cross, Cats Protection, Dogs Trust and the RSPCA, is calling on the public to research sellers thoroughly online before buying.

These warnings follow continued demand for pets since lockdown eased, with online marketplace Preloved reporting that the number of pet listing has increased by nearly 50% since March. They are anticipating a further boom in adverts throughout the summer.

Pets4Homes has also said that they are experiencing not only a six-fold increase in new user accounts, but an average of 155 views per new pet advert. Both Preloved and Pets4Homes are supporting the government's Petfished campaign, which urges people to stop and ask: 'Who's the person behind the pet?'

Despite a huge 125% increase in adverts posted across online marketplaces during lockdown for puppies, kittens, dogs and cats, demand continues to outstrip supply. However, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) has advised that vets are dealing with ongoing cases where owners have been sold sick puppies and kittens by unscrupulous dealers as a result of new owners not researching sellers before buying their new pet.

Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

Prospective pet owners must beware of sinister sellers out there who breed animals purely for profit with zero concern for their welfare. The devastating consequences include crippling vet bills and, in the worst cases, animals having to be put down.

It's vitally important that people not only research the breed of animal they want but also the person selling it to them.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

At this time when more people are looking for pets it is more important than ever that buyers do their research and ensure they go to a reputable seller.

Following the introduction of Lucy's Law earlier this year, everyone must now buy directly from breeders or consider adopting from rescue centres. So please look out for the warning signs and report any suspicious activity.

TV presenter Kirsty Gallacher, who has two dogs, British bull dog Betsy and French bull dog Bertie, said:

My dogs mean the world to me and pets bring joy to so many. It's shocking to hear the lengths deceitful sellers go to when selling pets and sadly this can mean animals come from low-welfare conditions with distressing consequences.

As pet lovers, we should take responsibility by always researching the seller before buying a new pet to ensure our four legged friends live happy and healthy lives.

The letter, also signed by former international rugby players Chris Robshaw and Sam Warburton, is part of the government's 'Petfished' campaign - a play on 'catfishing', where a stranger creates a fictional online persona to lure someone into a relationship - deceitful pet sellers use a similar tactic to 'Petfish' unsuspecting buyers.

Following [Lucy's Law](#) - meaning it is now illegal to sell a kitten or puppy you haven't bred - the Petfished campaign calls for consumers to remain vigilant, always researching the seller before visiting, reporting suspicious adverts and crucially be prepared to walk away and report suspected cases of animal abuse to the RSCPA or, if witnesses, the police.

British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) President Ian Ramsey said:

Vets are continuing to see many owners who have been sold very sick puppies by unscrupulous dealers simply because new owners have not researched the seller before buying their pet.

As a result, vets see first-hand the distress and upset this can cause owners. We would urge anyone thinking of buying a puppy or kitten to check their pet is coming from a responsible seller before making a decision to buy.

To avoid being Petfished, the public are being urged to spot vital red flags when researching sellers, with the help of the acronym S.P.O.T:

Seller

- Put the seller's name and phone number into a search engine – avoid those with multiple adverts.

Parent

- Make sure you see puppies and kittens in their home with their mother.

Old enough

- Check puppies and kittens are at least 8 weeks old before you take them home.

Treatment

- Ask to see the animal's health records and avoid sellers who can't provide them.

Anyone looking to buy a pet can get tips and advice on the Petfished campaign website by searching 'Get your pet safely' or visiting getyourpetsafely.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

- Petfished is a public information campaign run by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in England. It is supported by a range of animal welfare charities, veterinary organisations and commercial partners.
- Commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens were banned in England from 6 April 2020. Known as [Lucy's Law](#), the law means anyone looking to buy or adopt a puppy or kitten must deal directly with the breeder or with one of the nation's reputable rehoming centres.