

Press release: Back the fight against puppy smugglers and backstreet breeders, says animal welfare Minister

People planning to add a four-legged friend to the family this Christmas need to be wary of unscrupulous breeders and sellers, animal welfare Minister Lord Gardiner has warned today.

The UK is a nation of animal lovers, and each year thousands of us consider welcoming a pet into the family at Christmas time to add to the UK's 8.5 million pet dogs and 7.4 million cats. However, puppy smugglers and unlicensed sellers are ready to take advantage of the high demand by illegally importing them into the country, neglecting their health and welfare and not properly vaccinating them – leading to steep vets' bills and heartbreak for buyers when the puppies fall ill or in some cases, sadly die.

Consequently, it's now more important than ever that buyers are armed with the knowledge they need to buy responsibly and avoid inadvertently fuelling the illegal puppy smuggling trade.

Minister for animal welfare, Lord Gardiner, said:

We all know that a dog is for life, not just for Christmas. But that life could be cruelly cut short if they haven't been properly looked after by the breeder, bringing heartbreak to the family.

We are a nation of animal lovers and buyers can do their bit to avoid the dishonest sellers by never buying a puppy younger than 8 weeks old, seeing the puppy interact with its mother and checking on its health history.

The government announced earlier this year that some of the [Pet Advertising Advisory Group's minimum standards](#) will become mandatory for online sellers as part of a [swathe of reforms to the animal licensing system](#). The reforms will make it illegal to sell puppies younger than eight weeks and require anyone breeding and selling three or more litters a year to apply for a formal licence. Anyone trading commercially in pets online will need to be properly licensed.

The plans will be laid in Parliament in the new year and will empower local authorities to take tough action on 'backstreet breeders' and help ensure the pets we buy are healthy, happy and from reputable sellers.

Minister for animal welfare Lord Gardiner recently hosted a roundtable with a number of animal charities and websites including Gumtree, Preloved and Vivastreet to discuss the progress made so far. The Minister has since written to those invited to the roundtable to praise their work in helping to

stop illegal sellers and encouraging further action.

Lord Gardiner has also set out five simple tips to help anyone thinking of committing to a new pet to choose the right animal:

- Always consider a rescue dog in the first instance.
- If you are buying a puppy, only buy from reputable breeders and sellers – and make sure they're licensed if buying from a business rather than private seller.
- Never buy a puppy that's younger than 8 weeks old.
- Check the puppy's health history – check vaccinations, make sure it's microchipped, and consider asking the seller to complete the ['Puppy Contract'](#).
- See the puppy interact with its mother.

If something still doesn't feel right, don't be afraid to walk away and look elsewhere. You should also report suspect breeders and sellers to your local council or Trading Standards.

Paula Boyden, Dogs Trust Veterinary Director and Chair of PAAG said:

The ease and popularity of the internet means that the impulse buying of pets has increasingly become an appealing option for many prospective buyers. However, the lure of a quick sale also attracts many unscrupulous breeders and dealers to websites.

We urge buyers to be cautious when looking to buy an animal via an online advert and if they have any concerns, walk away and report the seller to Trading Standards.

John Fishwick, President of the British Veterinary Association, said:

Vets see first-hand the tragic consequences that can result from poorly bred and illegally imported puppies. We've heard awful stories of people buying puppies only for their puppy to be dead 24 hours later because of the way it was bred and cared for in its early days.

Owning a dog is a life-changing commitment and we'd advise anyone thinking about getting a dog to first speak to their local vet about the right breed for them and then use the free online Puppy Contract to ensure they get a happy, healthy and well-socialised puppy.

A dog should never be bought 'for Christmas' as it can be a stressful time of year for pets, with lots going on, so we'd recommend waiting until the new year to welcome a new dog into your home.

This announcement comes as the UK embarks on a package of reforms to make sure we are a leader in animal welfare once we leave the EU. From bringing in tougher prison sentences for those who abuse animals to mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses, the UK is leading the way with some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world.

1. More [information on the Pet Advertising Advisory Group](#), including a list of websites which are currently meeting their minimum standards.
2. Further [information on the RSPCA's Puppy Contract](#)