

Puppy lovers should pause for thought to avoid being 'Petfished' this Christmas, warns Chief Veterinary Officer

- Chief Veterinary Officer urges the public to think twice before buying a new pet this Christmas and to thoroughly research sellers
- 400% surge in searches for 'buy a puppy' expected from mid- November
- Public urged to look at the seller's profile and search their name online

Those looking to bring a new puppy or kitten home this Christmas are being urged to research the person behind the pet to avoid being lured in by deceitful sellers.

The price of puppies has more than doubled during lockdown according to the online marketplace Pets4Homes. This has led to the UK's Chief Vet raising concerns about the risk posed by deceitful low-welfare sellers who breed and keep animals in poor conditions to take advantage of this spike in prices.

With the new national restrictions in place until 2 December, prospective pet owners are being urged to be alert to the risks involved while they are not permitted to visit the animal in person in its home environment, and to think about additional checks they can undertake to ensure the seller is legitimate.

Animals bred in low-welfare conditions can often be separated from their mother too early in their development and this can lead to severe health and behavioural problems resulting in high vet bills.

Christmas has been a peak period for puppy sales for decades and research has shown this trend continuing. Last year the number of tweets mentioning buying puppies jumped by 435% in the lead up to Christmas. Online retailer Preloved, reported that the majority of what it considers to be 'high volume' days for pet listings – when sellers post the most adverts for cats, kittens, dogs and puppies – occurred between late November and mid-December last year.

Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

After a difficult year and with many of us spending more time at home, many people may be considering getting a new puppy or kitten.

However, the lead up to Christmas is a prominent time for unscrupulous sellers to take advantage of those looking to buy a new pet. That is why we are advising people to remain vigilant and to always thoroughly research sellers before getting in touch.

Potential buyers should also note that Christmas might not be the best time to get a pet as it can be noisy and chaotic, which isn't the best environment to settle in a new animal.

RSPCA chief executive Chris Sherwood said:

While the idea of a new pet joining your family around the tree may be a wonderful festive scene, the truth behind your Christmas puppy could be much darker.

Dogs used in the underground puppy trade lead miserable lives in horrific conditions and their puppies often have lifelong health and behavioural problems due to their poor start.

We're supporting the Petfished campaign to urge prospective buyers to always research the seller first. It is always much better to wait for the right dog than to rush into buying – and unwittingly support cruelty. If concerned, walk away from the seller and contact the RSPCA on 0300 1234 999.

The government-led Petfished campaign provides advice on how to research a seller and what warning signs to look out for, such as:

- Look at the seller's profile and search their name online. If they are advertising many litters from different breeds, then this is a red flag.
- Check contact details. Copy and paste the phone number into a search engine. If the number is being used on lots of different adverts, sites and dates then this is likely a deceitful seller.
- Check the animal's age. Puppies and kittens should never be sold if they are under 8 weeks old.
- Check what medical treatment the animal has had.

More information on what to do before contacting a seller and what to ask when you do get in touch can be found at getyourpetsafely.gov.uk or by searching 'Get your pet safely'.

Under Lucy's Law, since April 2020 commercial third-party puppy and kitten sales have been banned in England as part of a crackdown on puppy farms and untrustworthy sellers. This means that anyone wanting to get a new puppy or kitten in England must buy direct from a breeder, or consider adopting from a rescue centre instead. Licensed dog breeders are required to show puppies interacting with their mothers in their place of birth.

A new video 'The 12 Days of Petfished' has also been released today, reworking the lyrics of the Christmas classic to tell a story of a young puppy whose owners unwittingly purchase him from a deceitful seller and highlights the potential consequences for others who may fall into this trap. You can view the video [here](#).

Further information

- 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 partners supporting the campaign include Preloved, Pets4Homes, BorrowMyDoggy, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, UKPets and Fetch (Ocado)
- 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.