



FAQS RADIATION THERAPY IN VETERINARY PATIENTS



Frequently Asked Questions

How frequently will my pet be treated?

At Southfields, we can offer a range of radiation protocols, which are tailored to suit individual patients depending on their tumour type, age, and treatment goals. We also take into account any other medical conditions. The appropriate options will be discussed by your consultant at the first appointment. Stereotactic radiation is usually carried out over 1-5 days (mostly over 3-5 days), standard radiotherapy is carried out daily (not weekends) over 3-4 weeks (16-20 treatments) and palliative radiotherapy is usually carried out either daily for 5 consecutive days or once per week for 4-6 weeks.

Can my pet stay in the hospital throughout treatment as I work/live a long way away?

Yes. Please note there are additional charges for boarding.

Does my pet HAVE to stay in the hospital with you during their treatment course?

No. Currently, pets undergoing daily treatment can board with us throughout the whole length of the treatment protocol, including weekends, if this is preferred by owners. Some owners need their pets to board with us during the week but excluding weekends (they get admitted on the day of their first treatment, then they get discharged on a Friday afternoon and re-admitted Sunday afternoon/evening). Please note there are additional charges for boarding. If there are issues boarding your pet, you will be informed at the time of the consultation.

Can my pet have worming and flea treatment during radiotherapy?

Yes, the majority of pets are safe to receive worming and flea treatment during radiotherapy. You should always check this with your primary care vet.

Can my pet have an annual vaccination during treatment?

Ideally, we prefer vaccines either to be given a week or two before we start radiotherapy or a few weeks after the treatment is finished and any temporary side effects are resolved. However check this with us, as the advice may be case dependent.

Can my pet have a bath during radiotherapy?

We prefer for patients not to be bathed while undergoing radiotherapy. This is due to the risk of treatment field marks being rubbed off and also, should radiation side effects occur, it would be preferable to avoid contact with any shampoos which may cause irritation. However, again this is likely to be case dependent and depends on the site we are treating and expected toxicities.

Can I apply cream to the radiation site?

The radiation team will advise if this is required and provide with appropriate veterinary approved preparations, or make other recommendations.

Can I use bandages to cover the radiation site and prevent my pet licking it?

NO, bandaging is rarely indicated and can slow healing or even make things worse. If your pet is likely to lick at the radiation site, we strongly recommend a collar to avoid this, plastic, cloth and rubber versions can be purchased widely in veterinary practices and pet stores or online.

My pet will be taking medications during radiotherapy. Should I bring medication for my pet on admission?

YES, if your pet is staying with us during their treatment then please always **bring along all the medication that your pet is receiving to the hospital in its original packaging**. This includes any medication prescribed by your local vet for separate conditions e.g. joint pain. We usually have most medications in stock, but we would have to charge you for them. If you are fasting your pet prior to an anaesthetic, then unless otherwise instructed, you can still give the medications in the morning, but just with a small treat/nibble of food.

Should I bring toys/bedding for my pet?

NO, please do not bring personal items to the hospital as we are unable to admit them. They may go missing during cleaning duties. We cannot accept responsibility for lost items of sentimental/monetary value. We have a selection of bedding and toys for inpatient use.

When should my pet receive their last meal?

A meal is recommended to be given the night before a radiotherapy session. Radiotherapy is performed under general anaesthesia, so we need your pet to be starved for 8 hours beforehand to make the anaesthetic as safe as possible. They can have water at all times, unless instructed otherwise. There may be different advice should your pet have a specific dietary requirement, medical issue or is diabetic (diabetes mellitus) and is receiving insulin therapy.

When do the radiotherapy sessions happen?

Treatments are performed throughout the normal working day. We do not perform radiotherapy treatments during the weekend. We do treat patients on some, but not all, bank holidays and never on Christmas day. However, this depends on caseload and bank holiday treatments may not occur.

Where does my pet stay during radiation and what is the exercise/feeding regimen?

Cats and dogs are boarded in separate wards alongside other patients, in standard-size, individual hospital kennels. They are fed their daily resting calorie requirements after their treatment and we stock a large array of regular foods. Dogs have short, regular walks and cats have play-exercise time. You can bring your pet's own food should you prefer, but we do not accept raw diets. If your pet is raw fed, please transition them to a cooked food before boarding.

Is my dog of any risk to other people or animals during radiotherapy?

No, there is no risk to you, your family or other pets while your dog/cat is undergoing radiotherapy. They will not be radioactive.

Does radiotherapy make my pet feel sick?

Radiotherapy is a localised treatment given to the area of cancer and therefore does not typically make pets sick. There are however, local radiotherapy related side effects which will be explained to you by your oncologist. Dogs or cats can occasionally feel nauseous after a general anaesthetic and we can prescribe medication if this is a problem. Very occasionally, radiotherapy can make a pet feel sick if their stomach / intestinal tract is in the treated area, but this would be discussed by your pet's oncologist or one of the technicians.

Are there any other risks associated with radiotherapy for my pet?

Radiation is generally very safe and well tolerated, however, as with any clinical procedure there are always risks. Rarely patients may suffer complications related to anaesthesia (aspiration pneumonia, extremely rarely death), IV cannula use, reactions to medications, progression/development of other medical conditions and gastro intestinal upsets related to changes in routine. The team does everything possible to minimise these risks and to keep our patients happy and enjoying good quality of life during treatment.

When will my pet start radiotherapy?

We appreciate that this is a stressful time for owners and we do aim to start patients as soon as we can. However, complex treatments that require a computer plan can take time to produce and execute safely. Patient safety is a priority and we want to ensure that your pet's treatment is as safe and precise as possible. Therefore, waiting times to start radiotherapy after a planning CT is performed can take up to 2 weeks. Some patients will also be prioritised based on clinical need. Our Radiotherapy team will contact you once the starting date is known, **please only call to check on this if you have not received a start date 1 week from the CT scan**.

What time can my pet go home after the last treatment session?

This will be discussed with you at the start of treatment. For the first session, presume we will need your pet most of the day.

What will happen at the end of treatment?

This varies on a case-by-case basis. If you have been referred to us from an oncologist at another referral centre, then you will return to them for ongoing care. If we are your primary Oncology centre then we will discuss an ongoing plan at the time of the final treatment. You may be transferred to another member of the service (e.g. a medical oncologist) if your pet is due to receive chemotherapy after radiotherapy.

Will my pet have an intravenous catheter when going home?

With certain treatment protocols (twice a week), when pets are treated on the outpatient regime, they may be discharged with an intravenous canula. This is to reduce the number of times we have to place the intravenous canula. It is generally safe and you do not need to do anything with the canula. It is important that your pet is walked on the lead and prevented from licking at the canula site. You will be advised by Radiotherapy team should this be a case.

Can I visit my pet when boarding for the treatment?

NO, we do not permit visiting during boarding for radiation, as this can unsettle the patient and disrupts clinical services. This also helps staff to focus on patient care. This applies to weekdays as well as weekends.

What updates will I get about my pet if they board for the radiotherapy course?

Your Oncology clinician will contact you on the day of first treatment (usually phone, but please check your email) after your pet is fully recovered from the first anaesthetic and usually before the end of the day. Thereafter, you will receive a phone call from your oncologist (or another member of staff if they are unavailable) once a week for a general clinical update. Should there be a clinical concern, your oncologist will contact you straight away.

Can I have an earlier/later treatment or drop-off time?

No. Treatment times are allocated by clinical need. Some patients can take longer to recover and are therefore treated earlier in the day, and our top priority is always patient safety. Most of our clients do have a long journey to the hospital and we really appreciate their understanding when organising treatment times. Almost every owner wants an early discharge time to avoid the traffic (especially on the M25), but we clearly cannot accommodate this for all.

When do I pay for the treatment?

For uninsured clients, those who are paying and then claiming the costs back themselves from the insurance company or those where the treatment cost will go above their insurance limit, FULL payment for the entire treatment course (or shortfall) is required PRIOR TO the time of admission to start treatment. **Treatment will not proceed without this.** The overall estimate will be given to you by your oncologist at initial consultation. Should your dog or cat need a CT scan to plan the radiotherapy, this will be paid for on the day when it is performed, along with the fees to plan the actual treatment itself.).



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