

Pet insurance will not pay for expected costs of pet ownership such as vaccinations, neutering or preventative treatment.

As pet insurance only covers unexpected costs it will only pay for the treatment of illnesses that started (or accidents that happened) after you took out the policy.

All pet insurances require you to pay a fixed excess per condition claimed. The average is about £75 but ranges from £50-150. Some policies require you to pay a percentage of the claim (contribution payment) in addition to the excess. This is particularly common for older pets but some policies now have contribution payments for pets of any age. Contribution payments are mostly between 10-35%.

Different types of policies

1. Time-Limited Cover

These policies have a cover limit for each condition. But they will only pay for treatment of each illness or accident for up to a maximum of 12 months from when it first occurs. Your cover will end either when you reach the cover limit or after 12 months, whichever comes first.

Once your cover ends an exclusion will be put on the policy meaning that you will have to pay yourself for any further treatment required for this condition for the rest of your pet's life.

2. Maximum Benefit Cover

This is similar to time-limited cover except there is no time limit. Providing you keep renewing policy when it is due the insurance company will pay up to the stated cover limit for each separate condition.

Once you reach the cover limit an exclusion will be put on the policy, meaning that you will have to pay yourself for any further treatment required for this condition for the rest of your pet's life.

3. Lifetime Cover

This is also known as an annual benefit policy because it provides a cover limit for each policy year. Most policies have an annual cover limit to cover all conditions but some have an annual cover limit for each condition.

If the treatment exceeds the cover limit then you will not be able to claim for further treatment until the policy is renewed at the end of the policy year.

Third Party Liability (Dog policies only)

An important benefit provided by a pet insurance policy is third party liability cover. This part of the policy pays out if your dog injures a third party or damages their property. This covers legal costs, expenses and the claimants' expenses.

Pre-Existing Conditions

Definition of pre-existing condition:

"An injury or illness that first happened or showed clinical signs before you took out the policy."

or

"An injury or illness that has the same diagnosis or clinical signs as an injury, illness or clinical sign your pet had before you took out the policy."

or

"An injury or illness which is caused by, relates to, or results from an injury, illness or clinical sign your pet had before you took out the policy."

This means that if you claim for anything which can be connected to an illness or symptom your animal had before you took out the policy, the claim is likely to be rejected on the grounds that it is a pre-existing condition.

When a new claim is made on the policy a full medical history of your animal is sent with the claim so that it can be checked to see if there have been any accidents or illnesses which could be connected to the current claim.

New illnesses which are first noticed in the first 10-14 days of a new policy will also be treated as pre-existing conditions, and therefore excluded from the policy.

Changing Policies

If you decide to change your pet insurance provider at any point in your animal's life, any claims, illnesses, accidents which have occurred prior to this will be classed as a pre-existing condition, and therefore excluded from the new policy.

Most importantly, read the small print of the policy and fully understand the cover you have.