

Pet Perks

Tick Talk

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There has been a lot of media coverage in relation to ticks and tick-borne illnesses, such as Lyme disease, recently. It has only been over the past few years, in our area specifically, that we have been seeing any number of ticks. However, in places like eastern Ontario or the northeastern United States, they have been dealing with ticks and Lyme disease for many years in both people and pets. With the amount of information and hype that is out there about ticks we thought we should go over a few things.

What is a tick?

Ticks are arachnid parasites that rely on the blood of other animals for nutrition and survival. Ticks are found all over the world, but there are only 5 species of ticks that we routinely see in Ontario. These ticks are the American Dog Tick, Brown Dog Tick, Black-Legged or Deer Tick, Groundhog Tick, and Lone Star Tick, with the Deer Tick and American Dog Tick being the most common. These ticks have 4 life stages and often require 3 different animals to feed on to complete all the life cycle.

Typically ticks like to live in long grass or leaf litter in forests. However, the Brown Dog Tick is the only species that can actually live indoors in places like homes and kennels. Recent studies have shown that ticks will actively search for an animal to attach to in weather as cold as 2°C. This means that even on some winter days ticks can and will attach to animals, potentially infecting the animal or us with disease.



What are tick-bourne diseases?

A tick-bourne disease is any disease that a tick can carry and spread to animals that they bite. There are numerous tick-bourne diseases with differing prevalence around the world. The following are tick-bourne diseases of concern in Ontario:

Lyme disease

Lyme disease is caused by bacteria that lives within the Deer Tick and is transmitted through the tick's saliva. The tick requires at least 24 hours of feeding on the animal in order to transmit the bacteria. It takes the animal's body 3-5 weeks to test positive for the "infection". About 90-95% of dogs will never show clinical signs of Lyme disease, while the opposite is true in humans. Clinical signs of Lyme disease infection include shifting lameness/limping, intermittent fever, and kidney disease (urinary issues). Lyme disease can be treated if caught early, but sometimes even with treatment chronic disease can occur.

Expansion of the Deer Ticks that carry Lyme disease bacteria northward has led to the presence of Lyme disease in Canada. A lot of the dispersal into Canada of these ticks is likely due to migratory birds and increases in White-Tailed Deer populations. There is a risk of coming in to contact with a Lyme disease infected ticks even without travelling to Lyme disease "hot spots", as some studies have found that greater than 20% of Deer Ticks carry the Lyme disease bacteria.

There are vaccines available to help prevent Lyme disease in dogs. Talk to your veterinarian about whether the Lyme vaccine is right for your pet.

Ehrlichia

Ehrlichiosis is caused by bacteria that typically lives within the Brown Dog Tick and is transmitted through the tick's saliva. Ehrlichiosis can affect dogs and cats. It is rarely seen in our area currently but is seen along the eastern seaboard of the US. This disease causes issues with clotting, which can manifest as lethargy, depression, anorexia, fever, spontaneous bleeding, respiratory distress, and/or neurological signs. Ehrlichiosis is treatable if caught early, with German Shepherds and Dobermans experiencing more chronic and severe forms of disease.

Anaplasma

Anaplasmosis is caused by bacteria that typically live within the American Dog tick and is transmitted through the tick's saliva. Anaplasmosis can affect dogs, cats, farm animals, and people. It is rarely seen in our area currently as it is more commonly seen in tropical areas. This disease causes destruction of red blood cells which can manifest as lethargy, anemia, fever, lameness and painful limbs, and/or neurological signs. Anaplasmosis is treatable if caught early.



We test for all 3 of these major tick-bourne diseases with your annual or bi-annual “Heartworm Test”, which only requires a small amount of blood to complete. The 4Dx SNAP test will tell us within 10 minutes if your pet is positive for Heartworm or these tick-bourne diseases. Please talk to us more in-clinic about the test for your pet and when it should be done.

What do you do if you find a tick on your pet?

Do not panic! The faster the tick is removed from your pet the lower the odds that it can transmit a tick-bourne disease. However, if the tick is engorged (full of blood) when it is found on the pet there is a higher likelihood of transmission of disease. Some tick-bourne diseases can be transmitted within 4 hours of the tick biting and feeding on the pet, but more typically the tick must be attached on to the dog for 24 hours or more. It is important to know that when the tick attaches to the skin of your pet that it buries its head under the skin. If the tick is improperly removed and its head stays under the skin an area of inflammation or infection can develop as the pet’s body attacks the foreign object. When removing the tick you have to position your removal device (ie: tick twisters, tweezers, etc) as close to your pet’s skin as possible, which is essentially on the neck of the tick.

If you are concerned about the tick and/or your pet do not hesitate to call us at the clinic. We will even identify the species of tick for you at no charge, which can help in knowing whether your pet or yourself has been exposed to Lyme disease.

How do you prevent ticks on your pet?

Advantix (Imidacloprid, permethrin, pyriproxyfen)

Works by staying in the skin layer and kills ticks on contact. Ticks do not have to feed on the dog in order to die; therefore ticks should not bite the dog if this product is used. This drug is considered an insecticide. Not safe for use on cats; can cause tremors and death. Applied once a month to the skin. Swimming or bathing is not recommended for 48 hours after applying the product.

Nexgard (Afoxolaner)

Works by spreading systemically into the bloodstream through the guts. Ticks must bite and feed on the dog in ingest the drug and will then die. Not approved for use in cats. Given orally once a month.

Bravecto (Fluralaner)

Works by spreading systemically into the bloodstream through the guts. Ticks must bite and feed on the dog in ingest the drug and will then die. Not approved for use in cats. Given orally once every three months.

Revolution (Selamectin)

Works by spreading systemically into the bloodstream from the skin. Ticks must bite and feed on the dog in ingest the drug and will then die. Only protects against the American Dog Tick and Brown Dog Ticks. Does not protect against the Deer Tick, which is the tick that can transmit Lyme Disease. Safe for cats and dogs. Applied once a month to the skin. Swimming or bathing is not recommended for 48 hours after applying the product.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at the clinic (519)229-8911 if you have any further questions or concerns about ticks, testing, or preventatives.