

Ticks and Your Cat

- Ticks can transmit dangerous diseases, like cytauxzoonosis, when they attach to a cat and feed.
- Your veterinarian can recommend safe and effective products to help protect your cat from ticks.
- You should never remove a tick with your fingers. Tweezers or tick removal tools work well. When in doubt, ask your veterinary care team for assistance removing a tick.
- High fever
- Lethargy (tiredness)
- Appetite loss

The infection progresses very quickly (over a period of days) and many infected cats die from this disease.

Less commonly, cats can also contract tularemia from tick bites. Signs of this disease include:

What Are Ticks?

Ticks are small, eight-legged parasites that must drink blood in order to survive and reproduce. Ticks don't fly, and they can't jump (unlike fleas). In fact, ticks are more closely related to spiders and mites than to "insects" like fleas. Of the hundreds of tick species, approximately 80 are found in the United States. Ticks can feed on a variety of hosts, including cats, birds, dogs, and people.

Why Are Ticks a Problem for Cats?

It may be tempting to dismiss the importance of ticks on cats, because cats are less likely to be diagnosed with Lyme disease and some of the other diseases that ticks transmit to people and dogs. However, there are still reasons to be concerned about your cat coming into contact with ticks.

If a cat is heavily infested with ticks, the parasites can drink enough blood to cause anemia (severe blood loss). Additionally, if your cat brings ticks into the house, your family members could be exposed to Lyme disease and other diseases that ticks can transmit if they bite people.

Ticks can transmit a disease called cytauxzoonosis (pronounced *sight-oh-zo-uh-nosis*) to cats. This disease causes serious illness and even death in infected cats. Cytauxzoonosis is actually caused by two parasites. The first parasite, an infected tick, bites a cat and transmits the second parasite, a single-celled parasite called *Cytauxzoon felis*, to the cat. Once infected with *Cytauxzoon felis*, the cat may develop severe clinical signs, including:

- Loss of appetite
- Oral ulcers
- Fever
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Painful abdomen

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Humans can become infected with tularemia if they are bitten or scratched by a cat with the disease.

There is a popular myth that cats groom themselves so frequently and thoroughly that they remove all of their ticks. However, ticks can attach to the face, ears, and other areas that are difficult for cats to groom. This means that even a cat that grooms meticulously can still have a problem with ticks.

How Do Cats Get Ticks?

Despite a very popular myth, ticks don't fall or jump out of trees onto a host. However, ticks can climb, and they tend to attach themselves to shrubs and blades of tall grass. They can also live in dens of rodents and other small mammals. One species of tick can even live indoors.

When a host walks by and brushes against the grass or shrub where the tick is waiting, the tick climbs onto the host. Once on a new host, the tick eventually finds a location to attach and feed.

Preventive Care

Cats that roam or hunt rodents and small mammals are likely to be exposed to ticks, especially if they have access to wooded areas. However, even indoor cats can be exposed to ticks if dogs or humans bring ticks into the house.

How Can I Protect My Cat From Ticks?

Keeping your cat indoors can reduce the risk of exposure to ticks. If you have other pets that go outside and can bring ticks into the house, use an effective form of tick control and check them daily for ticks. If your cat must go outside, limiting exposure to wooded areas, tall grass, and other tick habitats is a good idea. However, this can be difficult if the cat roams freely and has access to these areas.

Safe and effective tick-control products can be used on cats to help protect them from ticks. There are many options, so ask your veterinarian about the best choice for your cat.

Remember that ticks are successful parasites that can be difficult to kill. Even if you are using an effective tick control product, you should still check your cat daily for ticks and remove any as soon as you find them. You should never remove a tick with your fingers. Tweezers work well, but be sure to grasp the tick close to the head and pull gently to avoid leaving the mouthparts imbedded in the skin. There are also tick removal tools that are very easy to use. Avoid using lighter fluid, matches, or other products that may irritate the skin or cause other injuries to your cat. When in doubt, ask your veterinary care team for assistance removing the tick.