

Ticks and Your Dog

- Ticks can transmit dangerous diseases, like Lyme disease, when they attach to a host and feed.
- Your veterinarian can recommend safe and effective products to help protect your dog 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.

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 birds, dogs, cats, and people.

Why Are Ticks a Problem?

If a dog is heavily infested with ticks, the parasites can drink enough blood to cause anemia (severe blood loss). However, ticks are mostly a concern because of the diseases they can transmit to their hosts. Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever are among the dangerous diseases that ticks can transmit to your dog. Although people can't catch these diseases from dogs directly, infected ticks can bite people and transmit them. If your dog is exposed to these dangers, chances are that you and your family may also be at risk for exposure.

How Do Dogs 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.

For some diseases, like Lyme disease, a tick must be attached for several hours in order to transmit the infection to a host. This means that if you check your dog (and yourself) daily, you have a chance of finding and removing any ticks before they can transmit Lyme disease.

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How Can I Protect My Dog From Ticks?

Keeping your dog out of wooded areas, tall grass, and other tick habitats is a good way to reduce the risk of exposure. However, this can be difficult for many pet owners, especially if they share an active outdoor lifestyle with their dog.

Effective tick control products can be used on dogs to help protect them from ticks. There are many options, including spot-on liquid products and collars. Your veterinarian can recommend a safe and effective product for your dog.

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 dog 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 dog. When in doubt, ask your veterinary care team for assistance removing the tick.