

Disease Prevention

Is Your Dog at Risk for Lyme Disease?



As the weather warms up, deer ticks that have been lying dormant over the winter are beginning their nymph life stage. This means they're at the prime stage to bite and potentially transmit Lyme disease to you and your dogs^{1,2}. Adult deer ticks can be active in the fall, winter, and early spring when ambient air temperatures exceed 40 degrees³, so it's important for your dog to be protected year-round.

How do dogs get Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is passed to humans and animals through bites from the small black-legged deer tick infected with *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a type of bacteria. Deer ticks are found in forests or grassy, wooded, marshy areas near rivers, lakes, or oceans. People or animals may be bitten by deer ticks during outdoor activities such as hiking or camping, or even while spending time in their backyards⁴.

Unfortunately, Lyme disease is difficult to diagnose and treat. It can cause recurring health problems for your dog, such as arthritis, or progress to rapid kidney failure⁵. The cornerstone for Lyme disease prevention is year-round tick control, prompt tick removal, Lyme vaccination, and routine disease screening.

If you live in certain areas of the United States, your pet is at higher risk for Lyme disease. According to the CDC, 95% of Lyme disease cases were reported from 14 states: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. A small number of cases have been reported along the West coast in California, Oregon, and Washington⁵. Additional emerging areas include Tennessee⁶, Virginia⁷, the Carolinas, and the Ohio River Valley⁸.

If you live in these states, your pet is at increased risk for Lyme disease. If you don't live in these states, that doesn't mean your dog is in the clear. Tick

boundaries have been shifting and expanding, so ticks that transmit Lyme disease are evident in almost every state⁹. And don't forget about when you travel with your pets — you may be visiting a location where Lyme-carrying ticks are more common. Because of all of this, it's important to talk with your veterinarian to see exactly what your pet's risk is, and how they recommend protecting your pet from the disease.

Symptoms of Lyme disease in dogs

Symptoms of Lyme disease may not show in your dog for months. Be on the lookout for these symptoms⁵:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Joint swelling
- Lameness
- Decreased activity
- Signs of kidney failure, such as excessive drinking or urinary accidents

If you notice any of these symptoms, see your veterinarian so your dog can be tested for Lyme disease. If they test positive, there are some things that can be done to help them, but your dog can still have lasting effects from it for life.

How can you protect your dog from Lyme disease?

Dogs can pick up ticks while outside and bring them into the home, putting dogs and humans at risk. You can protect your dog from Lyme disease by having them on a year-round parasite preventative that protects against ticks. You can also talk to your veterinarian about a Lyme disease vaccine that protects your dog from getting the disease in the first place. Your veterinarian can advise if the vaccine is a good fit for your dog based on their lifestyle.

How to remove a tick from your dog

The best way to prevent it is to keep ticks from biting your dog in the first place, or at least remove or kill the ticks before they have a chance to transmit the bacteria that causes Lyme disease (which typically takes 36-48 hours of attachment⁴).

Always remember to check your dog for ticks after time spent outdoors (even if your dog is on a preventative), especially after spending time in the woods or

thick grassy areas. If you spot a tick, never remove it with your fingers. Follow these steps for removal¹⁰:

- **Step 1:** Use fine-tipped tweezers to grab the tick as close to the skin as possible (don't squeeze — this could squeeze bacteria and other components of the tick's saliva into your pet in the process).
- **Step 2:** Using steady and even pressure, pull the tick straight up, being careful not to twist or jerk (which can cause the mouth bits to break off and remain in the skin). If the mouth breaks off, try to remove with tweezers or, if you're unable to remove it, leave it and let it heal.
- **Step 3:** Clean the bite area and your hands with soap and water or rubbing alcohol.
- **Step 4:** Dispose of the tick by putting it in alcohol, placing it in a sealed container, wrapping it tightly in tape, or flushing it down the toilet.

Learn more at zoetispetcare.com

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