

Is Your Dog at Risk for Lyme Disease?

When is my dog at risk for Lyme disease? Your dog can get Lyme disease in almost any outdoor location where the deer tick can be found, such as picnic areas, golf courses, woods, ponds, parks, playgrounds and your own backyard. Few areas of the country are completely Lyme-free --- the disease continues to spread geographically throughout the U.S. in increasing numbers.

How can I tell if my dog has been bitten by a deer tick? Inspect your dog's coat daily for ticks. If you see or feel a tick or a hard bump, call your veterinarian to learn how to remove the tick properly. If you remove a tick the same day it bites your dog, there's an excellent chance your dog will avoid infection because it takes about 36-48 hours for an infected tick to pass along the Lyme bacteria.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease in my dog? Canine Lyme disease is generally divided into three phases: Acute, Subclinical and Chronic.

- Acute (7-21 days): fever, joint swelling, arthritis, lameness, lethargy (lack of energy). These symptoms may be hidden at this stage, or may appear as symptoms of many other ailments.
- Subclinical (1-3 years): no signs. During this phase, the disease is progressing, but your dog will appear healthy and will seem to have "gotten over" the early symptoms.
- Chronic (4+ years?): Chronic arthritis, lameness, kidney failure, irregular heartbeat and other heart problems. This phase can cause the most pain and suffering and is much more difficult to treat.

* *The nymphal stage of the Deer Tick is roughly the size of a single poppyseed.*

Your dog may be at risk for Lyme disease. You can help your veterinarian assess that risk by answering the following questions.

Does your dog go to parks, or other wooded and grassy areas? yes no

Has your dog had a tick removed in the past year? yes no

Do you take your dog hunting, camping or hiking? yes no

Has Lyme disease been diagnosed in your area of the country? yes no

Does your dog accompany you on picnics, trips to the woods or the beach? yes no

Is it likely that you would miss seeing a tick the size of a pin head on your dog? yes no

Does your dog ever run through tall grass, underbrush or bushes? yes no

If you answered YES to any of these questions, ask your veterinarian about protecting your dog from Lyme disease.

What about Brown Ticks and Ehrlichiosis?

How can I tell if my dog has been bitten by a brown dog tick? Inspect your dog's coat for ticks. If you see or feel a tick or a hard bump, call your veterinarian and ask for directions on how to remove the tick properly. The key to disease prevention is to avoid exposure to ticks.

What are the symptoms of Ehrlichiosis in my dog? Symptoms range from mild to severe, depending upon the phase of the infection and your dog's physical reaction to the parasite.

- The acute phase: During the early stage of infection, you may not notice any changes in your dog, or you may notice that your dog seems a bit depressed, has lost his or her appetite or simply has a runny nose or eyes. Regardless of what you see externally, inside your dog the parasite is disrupting the production of red and white blood cells in the bone marrow. These cells are essential to maintaining many normal body functions.

- The subclinical phase: This phase may last for years. In some dogs, the immune system (infection fighting system) may be able to eliminate the parasite. During this phase, some of the changes that occur in the acute phase may return. If the dog is unable to eliminate the parasite, damage to the bone marrow may continue and the dog will progress to the chronic phase.
- The chronic phase: In the third stage of an untreated infection, your dog would likely show more severe signs of illness. These symptoms can last for years. The severity and the progression of the disease varies from dog to dog, but are linked to your dog's age and exposure to other diseases. You may see nose bleeds or blood in the dog's urine. Other problems can develop, such as in the kidneys, the nervous system and the reproduction system. Joints may also be affected. In severe cases these conditions are potentially life threatening.

How does my vet test my dog for Ehrlichiosis? Your veterinarian can use a simple in-clinic test to screen your dog for exposure to Ehrlichiosis, heartworm, and Lyme disease (another tick-borne disease) all at once, using one blood sample with results in just 8 minutes. Additional tests can be performed to determine whether the parasite has affected your dog's immune system and other vital body organs. A positive test result for Ehrlichiosis indicates that your dog has been exposed to and bitten by an infected tick. The earlier the detection, the better the outcome.

How is Ehrlichiosis treated? If the test results are positive and no other problems are diagnosed by your veterinarian, antibiotics will be sent home with you so you can treat your dog. Even if your dog is not showing symptoms, it is recommended that your dog be treated. This will prevent the parasite from multiplying and spreading to the bone marrow, ultimately leading to further damage to the immune system. If there are other conditions or symptoms diagnosed in your dog, your veterinarian will recommend treating these as well.

In the acute phase of the infection, treatment generally relieves clinical signs quickly; however, all antibiotics must be given to be completely effective. In the chronic phase, there will be gradual improvement in your dog and drug therapy may be required for a longer period. Your veterinarian may suggest recheck visits to monitor your dog's progress.

How can I prevent Ehrlichiosis infection in my dog? The proven, most effective prevention of infections is to control your dog's exposure to brown dog ticks. For example, treat your dog with a topical tick prevention and control product prior to going into wooded areas and pastures. There are collars available for control. Your veterinarian can recommend several products to you. Environmental control may be needed as well. If you see a tick on your dog, follow directions given by your veterinarian for the proper removal of the tick. You should have your dog tested for Ehrlichiosis if you suspect any past or recent exposure to ticks or if your dog is displaying any unusual signs or symptoms.

Am I at risk of infection? There are no proven cases of direct transmission of the Ehrlichiosis parasite from dogs to people. The brown dog tick rarely bites people. The primary health risk for people and dogs is exposure to ticks in the woods and pastures, so you may want to wear long pants and long sleeved shirts when venturing into these areas, and remember; there are topical treatments and tick collars that can reduce your dog's risk.

Flanary Veterinary Clinic
www.flanaryvet.com