

Ticks

Ticks are found worldwide and can cause a variety of problems, especially during the spring and fall months. They are vectors for many diseases in dogs, cats and humans, as well as other animals. Problems and diseases include blood loss, tick paralysis, Lyme Disease, "tick fever", Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, canine babesiosis, canine ehrlichiosis and canine hepatozoonosis. In addition, the saliva of ticks can produce an allergic hypersensitivity reaction. All are important diseases which need to be prevented whenever possible. Although ticks suck blood, they are far more dangerous as carriers of microbes that cause serious disease.

The tick has a complicated life-style which runs between 10 and 23 weeks and involves three hosts, including wild and domestic animals and humans. The adult tick will drop onto its host usually as the host walks through tall grass and shrubs. The tick can attach itself to any part of the host's body, but are most commonly found around the ears and between the toes. Ticks are not as common in cats because cats keep their coats well groomed, but when present, the ticks can usually be found in inaccessible areas such as around the ears and head, neck, back and between the toes.

The male tick is small and flat and is usually no bigger than the head of a match stick. The female tick is the blood tick about the size of a pea. The male and female tick mate on the skin of their host, after which the female takes a blood meal. They feed on blood but don't actually bite. They attach to their host by sticking their harpoon-shaped mouthparts into the animal's skin and then suck the blood. It is during feeding in which the diseases are transmitted. After feeding, the female is engorged with blood and can appear 20 - 50 times their normal size. Ticks will feed between 5 and 20 hours after choosing their host, thus prompt tick removal is important in the prevention of tick-borne diseases. Female ticks can lay between 4,000 and 5,000 eggs, after which they will die. The males will live to mate with several

females.

The diagnosis of tick infestation is not difficult. Carefully check your pet after hiking through wooded and grassy areas or any area that can be tick-infested. Remember that ticks can pose health risks to humans, so it is important to wear disposable rubber gloves when removing or handling ticks. If the ticks found are unattached, they are easily removed with a pair of tweezers. Once removed, they can be killed by putting them in rubbing alcohol.

A blood tick with its head buried in the skin should not be pulled out, as the head may detach and remain in the skin. If the mouth parts remain in the skin, redness and swelling may occur at the site of the bite. In most cases, it will resolve on its own, but it can potentially cause an infection which would require veterinary treatment. To remove an embedded tick, apply rubbing alcohol or a commercial tick treatment directly to the tick with a cotton tipped applicator. In about a minute, the tick will begin to back out. At this point, grab the tick with the tweezers and lift it off, and then you can kill it by placing it in rubbing alcohol or by flushing down the toilet.

In the case of heavy infestation, you may have to use an insecticide dip for ticks, dipping every week for four to six weeks. You must also treat the animal's sleeping quarters.

The best treatment is prevention. If you live or go anywhere that ticks may exist, such as mountains, meadows or anywhere tall grasses, weeds and brush or shrubs are present, it is advisable to use some sort of tick prevention. Frontline Plus for cats and Frontline Plus for dogs kills both fleas and ticks and is recommended by veterinarians. It is easy to apply and lasts up to 30 days which makes it popular with owners.