

Lyme disease and your dog

Here are answers to commonly asked questions about ticks and Lyme disease. For more information, follow up with your veterinarian.

Q What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is a bacterial disease spread by ticks. It's most prevalent in the Northeast, but it has been discovered in almost all parts of the United States. Lyme disease affects dogs and humans and is rare in other domestic animals.

Q How does it spread?

A bite from a tick, most commonly the black-legged deer tick, transmits the bacteria to dogs. Wooded, dense areas are common locations for these ticks. When it's attached to a host, ticks can spread Lyme disease through their saliva. It is not spread from one person to another or from a dog to a human.

Q What are the symptoms?

A rash may appear around the tick bite soon after infection; however, it may not be noticeable if your dog has a lot of fur. Other symptoms include fever, lethargy, swollen lymph nodes, loss of appetite, and limping. Some infected dogs don't show any symptoms, making it difficult to diagnose. The disease can cause kidney inflammation, and it can damage the heart and nervous system in its later stages. Blood or joint fluid tests are often needed to diagnose the disease.

Q How is it treated?

Antibiotics like doxycycline can help treat dogs. Additional medications can help with pain and inflammation. Treatment can take months or longer, and it's most successful when it's started within a few weeks of infection. It's possible for the bacteria to remain in the body long-term, leading to periodic flare-ups.

Q How is it prevented?

It's best to avoid areas infested with ticks. Tick repellents are beneficial for people and pets, but be sure to read all labels carefully and follow safety precautions. Your veterinarian can recommend effective tick control products that are safe for dogs. After leaving a tick-infested area, check your dog—and yourself—thoroughly. You can remove attached ticks with tweezers or inexpensive tick removal tools.

Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible and pull it straight out. Do not apply insecticide or a hot match—this may increase the amount of saliva released by the tick. After you remove the tick, clean the area with antiseptic soap and wash your hands. There are Lyme disease vaccinations recommended for dogs living in areas where the disease is prevalent. Check with your veterinarian to see if your dog should be vaccinated.