

Have you ever wondered why Dr. K, Dr. Munn, and Dr. Wrenn recommend that your pet be placed on a flea and tick preventative all year here in North Carolina? Fleas are certainly a very common pest, but we often forget that ticks are also an important threat to our pets' health!

Some of the most common ticks in this area, both on us and on our pets include:

1. American Dog Tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*)
2. Brown Dog Tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*)
3. Lone Star Tick (*Amblyomma americanum*)
4. Black Legged Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)

Many of these ticks are most active in the spring, summer, and fall, but some adults may also be active during the winter months.

While many tick bites may simply cause a small red itchy bite on your pet's skin, ticks can also spread several diseases. Ehrlichiosis, Anaplasmosis, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and Lyme Disease are among the many infections that can occur following a tick bite. While Lyme disease used to be thought to be more of a risk farther north, we are starting to see some exposure in this area (see Lyme disease Article).

Probably the most frustrating thing about tick borne diseases is that they have relatively vague symptoms, and often people do not specifically remember finding a tick on their pet. Many dogs may show fever, a decreased appetite, or signs of lameness. As you can imagine, these symptoms may not immediately suggest tick borne bacterial infection. Some severe infections may even affect the neurologic system or internal organs.

A complete panel of blood work is necessary to aid the veterinarian in diagnosis of one of these diseases. All of these diseases may cause changes in the numbers of white blood cells as well as a decrease in the number of red blood cells and platelets present. The blood work panel is often followed by more specific blood testing to determine if the body has been exposed to any of the specific bacteria we know to be transmitted by ticks.

Many of these infections can be successfully treated with antibiotic therapy, especially if diagnosed early. However, prevention of these infections allows you to avoid the stress of illness on your pet, as well as chronic inflammatory conditions that can occur as a result of infection.

So what can YOU do to avoid infections spread by ticks in YOUR pet??

1. Use a flea and tick preventative year-round! Frontline Plus, ProMeris (K9), and Preventic collars are several products we carry that are very effective at killing ticks soon after they get on your pet.
2. Check your pet for ticks often, especially after hiking or being out in the yard.
3. Remove any imbedded ticks immediately using tweezers or a DeTicker tool (available at Chatham Animal Hospital), being careful to remove the entire mouthpiece.
4. Bring your dog in for a yearly heartworm screening and they will also be screened for exposure to the bacteria that cause Ehrlichiosis, Anaplasmosis, and Lyme disease.