



# Pet Talk

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## TALK ABOUT TICKS!

Ticks are not only a nuisance, but also pose health hazards for you and for your pets. Since exposure to these pests is generally highest during the summer months, now is the time to pay attention to protecting your family and pets.

The tick is a blood-sucking arachnid parasite with a one-piece body belonging to the same class of animals as spiders, mites, and scorpions. Feeding off mammals, birds, and reptiles, they have world-wide distribution, with approximately 850 species described. There are two well established families of ticks, commonly referred to as "hard ticks" and "soft ticks." Both are important vectors of disease-causing agents to humans and animals, including bacteria, rickettsiae, protozoa and viruses.

Ticks are hardy and prolific creatures. Adult females of some species lay approximately 100

eggs at a time, while others may lay 3,000 – 6,000 per batch. Depending on its species, a tick may take less than a year or up to several years to go through its life cycle. While ticks need a blood meal at each stage after hatching, some species can survive years without feeding.

Ticks live in woods, beach grass, lawns, forests, and even urban areas. Ticks may carry various infectious organisms that can transmit diseases to cats and dogs, including Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, and tick paralysis.

Ticks also cause disease in humans including Lyme disease, ehrlichiosis, babesiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, and tick-borne relapsing fever. Lyme disease is by far the most often reported tick-borne disease in humans and the number of reported cases has increased each year. Although the greatest

number of cases has been reported in the Northeast, upper Midwest and Pacific Coast areas, infections have been reported in most all states. The peak season for occurrence is during the late spring extending to late fall, but the disease has been reported year round. Lyme disease occurs most commonly in children aged 2 to 15 years old and in adults aged 30 to 55 years old. Symptoms include fatigue, chills, and fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, swollen lymph nodes, and a red, circular skin rash. Antibiotics are used to treat Lyme disease and are most effective with an early diagnosis. If Lyme disease is not treated, long term complications may occur.

There is a vaccine approved for use in dogs to help prevent Lyme disease. Its use is controversial, however, and your veterinarian can help you decide whether it is indicated for your dog.

### Did you know that...

According to the May, 1999 issue of *FDA Veterinarian*, "A study of heart attack victims demonstrated that patients with pets in the family have a significantly greater chance of surviving. Another study showed that people's blood pressure is lower when they are talking to pets than to other people."