

Ticks

Like the intestinal parasites, ectoparasites live at the expense of their host. External parasites live on the outside of the body. Examples are fleas and ticks, which plague both dogs and cats. Within the past decade, technologically advanced flea products for dogs and cats have significantly reshaped the way veterinarians and pet owners approach common ectoparasites. Today's flea products have set new performance standards, including broader-spectrum activity, longer duration of protection (even after water immersion or bathing), and pet-friendly application enhancements. However, even with these major strides, these pests remain a real threat to the health and well being of our pets. When we look at flea and tick control, it is important to take a preventive approach.

Description

A tick is a small insect that buries its head in an animal's skin and ingests a blood meal often transmitting disease. Damage from ticks includes blood loss from severe infestation and skin irritation from bites. Ticks can be removed by hand (using tweezers) or through the use of insecticides.

Adult ticks lay eggs on the ground in sheltered spots such as in sheds, in woodpiles, under rocks, and in the crevices of walls. Immature ticks hatch from these eggs. These ticks then infest plants such as grass and shrubs as they wait for a suitable host, such as a rodent, dog, or cat. After feeding on the host for up to 10 days, immature ticks fall off the animal to complete the next phase of their life cycle. Before laying eggs, most species of ticks will feed on two more host animals. A life cycle is usually completed in one year, but may take up to 3 years. Unfortunately, ticks can survive long periods of cold weather. Most ticks require a moist environment for survival. But one species, the brown dog tick, can survive in areas of low moisture. This adaptation makes the brown dog tick more difficult to eliminate because it can reproduce in houses and kennels. Ticks are indiscriminate parasites; they may feed on dogs, cats, rabbits, deer, people, and other hosts.

Ticks may appear on any animal that is exposed to tick-infested vegetation. If the infestation is uncomplicated, its only sign may be ticks attached to the animal's skin. Ticks are usually found on the ears, head, and neck, but may be found on any part of the body. Ticks may be found in various stages of engorgement, so they may be small and brown, large and whitish brown, or any size and color in between. The skin where a tick is attached may be reddened and inflamed. Ticks can carry many microorganisms from one animal to another. As a result, tick infestation may be accompanied by or precede disorders such as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever or Lyme disease (a disorder characterized by joint and musculoskeletal abnormalities). Dogs are also at risk for Ehrlichia (which can be fatal). Like fleas, ticks can cause blood loss and anemia. It is not uncommon for animals to need a blood transfusion because of tick anemia.

There are several different kinds of ticks that range in size from small (no bigger than a pinpoint) to large. All kinds are potentially harmful, and pets should be treated at the first sign of infestation.

Life Cycle

1. Adult ticks attach to pets.
2. Ticks lay eggs.
3. In 30 days, the eggs hatch into larvae. *
4. The larvae develop into adult ticks. *

*These stages are treatable with insecticides.

The life cycle of the tick can be as short as two months or as long as two years. High temperatures and humidity speed up the life cycle of the tick.

Treatment

As with fleas, to control and conquer tick infestation, the parasite must be eliminated from the host (pet) and from the environment. Frontline or Revolution is appropriate for mild to moderate tick problems. A Preventic Collar (ticks only) may also be necessary. The important thing to remember about ticks is the thirty-day incubation period of the eggs. The environment must be controlled for thirty days to break the life cycle of the tick. Insecticides kill only adult ticks, not their eggs. Therefore, if eggs have just been laid, treatment will need to continue until the eggs have hatched and the insecticide can control the infestation. Clients are advised to treat the pet, treat the house and treat the yard with insecticide, giving an especially thorough soaking to wood piles, sides of buildings, and trunks of trees. Eliminating ticks from homes and kennels may require spraying the premises with an insecticide designed to kill ticks. Repeated treatments are often necessary.

Prevention Is The Key...

Early treatment of the environment, especially areas prone to tick infestation, will help prevent problems at the height of tick season. Clients should also examine their dogs for ticks regularly. Be sure to look inside the dog's ears, under its legs, and between its toes — all favorite hiding places for ticks. Pets should be treated for ticks at the first sign of any problem.