

Four Ways to Knock Out Ticks

Learn how to incorporate tick testing and protection for your patients

By Wendy S. Myers

A client with a 10-year-old German shepherd worries that her aging friend may have serious health problems. King has spouts of lameness, tires easily after walks and turns his nose at mealtime. In addition to a thorough history and physical exam, King needs diagnostic testing to determine the cause of his symptoms.

When patients present with fever, mild lymphadenopathy, splenomegaly and polyarthritis, Dr. Rick Alleman, associate professor and coordinator of Clinical Pathology at the University of Florida in Gainesville, recommends testing for tick-borne diseases as part of your workup. Some dogs also present with nonspecific signs of depression, chronic fever or anorexia.

Rising deer populations, warmer temperatures and growing suburbs are helping ticks migrate farther and faster. A deer tempted by lush landscaping may leave behind more than damaged shrubs. Ticks can drop off deer, raccoons, opossums and rodents into yards where they lay eggs and discover new hosts such as the family dog.



Deer Tick

Black-legged and deer ticks carry Lyme disease, which is a tick-transmitted infection caused by the spirochete bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Bacteria are transmitted when an infected tick feeds on the animal. Bacteria damage many organs, including the liver, heart, nervous system, joints and kidneys. Clinical signs are lack of appetite, depression, fever, stiffness, arthritis, shifting leg lameness, joint pain

Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates Lyme disease is highest in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maryland and Wisconsin. During the last five years, all states except Hawaii have documented cases. To find out Lyme disease prevalence in your state, visit

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/lyme/resources/StateTable_05.pdf.

During every wellness exam, talk with clients about the importance of protecting their best friends from tick-borne diseases. Protection might include using a year-round flea and tick preventative as well as vaccinating for Lyme disease. Incorporate testing for tick-borne diseases into your wellness protocols, with the same emphasis as heartworm testing and intestinal parasite screens. Follow these four steps to develop a proactive approach to preventing tick-borne diseases:

Step 1: Incorporate tick testing into wellness exams



Because symptoms of tick-borne illnesses vary from patient to patient, testing helps you detect exposure and infection. Consider an in-clinic test such as IDEXX's SNAP 4Dx Test, which screens for four diseases: heartworm disease, ehrlichiosis, Lyme disease and

anaplasmosis. Then you'll have results within minutes so clients get peace of mind knowing preventatives and vaccination are providing protection, or if a test is positive you can immediately explore treatment options. Evaluate whether in-clinic or reference laboratory testing is the best option for your hospital.

When you begin tick testing, your healthcare team can better understand the incidence and risk of disease in your area. For a map of U.S. canine positive Lyme test results, visit <http://www.idexx.com/animalhealth/testkits/4dx/lymemap.htm>.

Step 2: Recommend year-round flea and tick preventatives

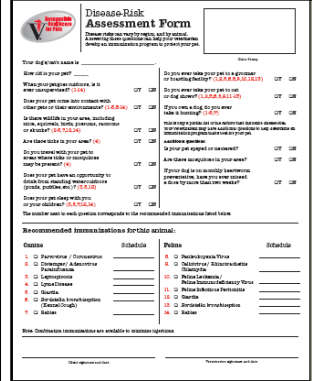
The Companion Animal Parasite Council (www.capcvet.org) recommends placing dogs and cats on year-round preventative flea and/or tick products as soon after birth as possible (consistent with label claims) for the life of the pet. Because substantial geographic differences occur in tick prevalence and seasonality, CAPC supports year-round use of topical tick-control products on pets.

Step 3: Vaccinate appropriate dogs for Lyme disease

The Companion Animal Parasite Council says the decision to vaccinate against Lyme disease should be based on a risk assessment of the individual dog, including where the dog lives and how often it frequents a tick-infested area. Ask risk-assessment questions such as:

- Is there wildlife in your area (mice, squirrels, birds, possums, raccoons or skunks)?

- Are there ticks in your area?
- Do you travel with your pet to areas where ticks or mosquitoes may be present?
- Have you ever found a tick on your dog or on any other pet or person in your household?



You can get a free Disease-Risk Assessment Form from your Fort Dodge Animal Health representative or download it from the National Pet Wellness Month website, www.npwm.com. If clients answer yes to risk-assessment questions, consider vaccinating their dogs for Lyme disease. Also give clients brochures such as IDEXX's "Ticks and Mosquitoes: Could they be secretly infecting your dog?" and Fort Dodge Animal Health's brochure on LymeVax®.

Step 4: Teach clients what to do at home

Ask clients to inspect their dogs' coats daily for ticks, feeling for ticks or hard lumps. If they find a tick, they should remove it and call your hospital to see if testing is needed.

Encourage clients to watch for signs of infection in their pets such as lameness, swollen or painful joints, lack of energy, weight loss, vomiting, diarrhea, runny nose or eyes, tiredness after moderate exercise or a mild, persistent cough.

Clients also can protect themselves from tick-borne disease with these tips from CAPC:

- Avoid-tick infested areas when possible
- Wear light-colored clothing when entering infested areas
- Walk in the center of trails, avoiding vegetation at trail margins
- Use a chemical repellent such as DEET, picaridin or permethrin
- Perform daily tick checks when vacationing or visiting tick-infested areas

When you take a combination approach of testing and protection, you'll prevent tick-borne disease from infecting patients and gain the trust and confidence of clients who know you're looking out for them and their best friends.

About the Author:



Wendy S. Myers owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Denver. Her consulting firm helps teams improve compliance, client service and practice management. Communication Solutions for Veterinarians has provided mystery phone shopper training to more than 2,600 receptionists nationwide. Wendy is a partner in Animal Hospital Specialty Center, a 13-doctor AAHA-accredited referral practice offering internal medicine, surgery, neurology, oncology, specialty dentistry, and emergency care in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She is the author of four books and five videos. Subscribe to Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' e-newsletter on our website at: www.csvets.com. E-mail Wendy at: wmyers@csvets.com.