

Improving Compliance for Year-Round Flea and Tick Protection

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By Wendy S. Myers



A client with bloodshot eyes arrives with her basset hound, Annabelle, with the same tired, droopy look. Annabelle's constant scratching kept both the pet owner and dog awake all night. The client stopped using flea and tick control during winter months. But cooler temperatures didn't send fleas south to vacation in warm, humid climates. They'd

found paradise on Annabelle and another oasis on Daisy, the family's indoor cat.

Skipping just one month of protection can be a welcome mat for fleas and ticks to reestablish infestation, cause flea allergy and spread disease. One adult flea can lay 50 eggs a day. Adult fleas can live as long as one year and lay 2,000 eggs during their lifetime. Blood-sucking ticks can spread zoonotic diseases such as Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Depending on the species, adult female ticks can lay 100 eggs at once or as many as 3,000 to 6,000 eggs per bunch. A tick's lifecycle ranges from several months to years depending on the species and environmental conditions.

Changing climate conditions means flea and tick seasonality also fluctuates. For example, Colorado experienced two blizzards with record-setting snowfalls in late December but the same month saw a high of 76 degrees. The exact start and stop of flea and tick seasonal applications is difficult to decipher, so why not encourage clients to take the guess work out with year-round, constant protection?

The Companion Animal Parasite Council (www.capcvet.org) recommends administering flea and tick products year-round. Guidelines suggest using parasite control methods that consider the pet's lifestyle and health, managing the pet's environment and working closely with pet owners to prevent infestation and protect the entire family's health. Here are ways your team can improve compliance for year-round protection from fleas and ticks:

1. Set a standard of care for year-round protection. Everyone on your healthcare team—from veterinarians to receptionists—should echo this protocol to clients. Teach staff about the lifecycles of fleas and ticks and how to educate clients during staff meetings. Invite pharmaceutical company representatives to share the latest research and product information.



2. Involve staff in monitoring client compliance. Assign someone to pull and review patients' records before clients' arrival. Check each pet's compliance status for all products and services your hospital team has identified as important. In the medical record, note areas where the pet is out of compliance or requires follow up such as intestinal parasite screen, heartworm test, date of purchase of last flea and tick preventative, dental cleaning, etc. If your hospital uses a travel sheet, pre-circle or highlight needed services and products.

3. Have receptionists ask clients about refills upon check-in. *“Do you need any flea and tick preventative refills while you're here today?”* Asking the client at check-in lets receptionists have the product ready with a personalized prescription label when the client checks out. You'll reduce wait time for medications and improve client service and compliance.

Always offer clients a 12-month supply first. If they cannot afford 12 months today, go to a six-month supply and enter a reminder or callback in five months so clients can repurchase. This ensures the pet stays on year-round protection. Only offer a single dose as a last resort or if it is a puppy whose weight will change and need a different dose. Enter a callback in 20 days so the client can pick up the next dose within 30 days.

4. Cast a wide net of client education. Use brochures, bulletin boards, posters, hospital website, check-writing pads and other educational venues to spread news of your standard of care for year-round protection from fleas and ticks.

5. Choose one flea and tick product for puppy and kitten kits. As a veterinary consultant, I watched a technician spend seven minutes explaining multiple flea and tick products to new puppy owner. The client patiently nodded, waited until the technician took a breath, and then asked, *“Can't I just use the same brand as my other dog?”* Compliance is easiest for the client when all family pets are

on the same brand, plus you'll confuse clients with too many options. Although your hospital may carry several brands, select a primary flea and tick product for puppy and kitten kits.

6. Ask questions to confirm monthly compliance. Create a questionnaire for staff who open client appointments so every pet owner gets asked the same questions every wellness visit. For example, the technician would ask the client, “*What flea and tick control do you use? What day of the month do you apply it?*” If the client can't instantly answer, chances are the pet is unprotected. The technician then explains your practice's standard of care for year-round protection. For a sample wellness questionnaire, order *The Veterinary Practice Management Resource Book & CD* from www.csvets.com or 720-344-2347. Many flea and tick product manufacturers' websites also offer monthly e-mail reminders on the day of the month the client needs to administer the preventative.

7. Check every pet for parasites during the physical exam. Run a flea comb through the pet's fur to check for evidence of flea dirt. Include flea combs in puppy and kitten kits and display flea combs for sale in the reception area. Encourage clients to do routine flea checks at home. Remind them to check pets' heads, necks and paws for ticks, especially after going outdoors.



8. Test for tick-borne diseases. When drawing blood for an annual heartworm test, consider screening for tick-borne diseases. Reference labs and in-house tests let you screen for diseases such as *Ehrlichia canis*, Lyme disease and *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*. Common signs are often hidden, so consider a protocol to screen all dogs. Testing helps you detect exposure and infection and reinforces the importance of year-round tick control.

Clients expect specifics from you on what medical services and products their pets need for optimal wellness. Say “*Your pet needs...*” instead of “*I'd recommend...*” When you speak about year-round flea and tick protection with passion, you'll protect more pets and win clients' trust and confidence in your medical services and products.

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.