

8 Facts to Fight Fleas and Ticks

Arm yourself to keep your dog pest-free.

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Spring might kick off flea and tick season, but prevention requires year-round effort. "Fleas reproduce at such a fast rate that things can get out of control very quickly," says Daniel Snyder, DVM, of Indianapolis, secretary-treasurer of the American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists. "Ticks, particularly, can spread disease to both dogs and humans, so it's important to get rid of them quickly."

You can eliminate circumstances under which fleas and ticks flourish. Keep your yard well manicured, and dispose of grass cuttings and leaves. Remove brush and rock piles. Stack firewood away from your house. Cover garbage cans. Use a flea comb also good for ticks on your dog every day or two during the height of flea season (which varies depending on where you live). Vacuum every week, including couches, chairs, and beds, and wash your dog's bedding in hot water.

Protect your dog by remembering these eight important facts:

1. Fleas multiply fast. A female flea can produce 600 offspring in one month. A flea's life cycle from egg to larva to pupa to adult can be as short as 12 days or as long as 174 days, depending on temperature and humidity, says Candice Sousa, DVM, a veterinarian in Sacramento, Calif.
2. Ticks spread other diseases. Deer ticks and western black-legged ticks carry Lyme disease, caused by the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The first sign of Lyme: A circular rash at the bite site, followed by lameness, fever, and lethargy. If caught early, antibiotics usually knock out the disease.

Ticks also can carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever, most prevalent in the south Atlantic and south central United States and caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia rickettsii*. Symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, depression, vomiting, and diarrhea. Antibiotics usually cure the dog. If left untreated, it can be fatal.

3. Risk varies. Fleas and ticks thrive in warm weather, so prevention takes more vigilance as the mercury climbs. If you walk your dog through tall-grass meadows and wooded areas, it has a greater chance of exposure to ticks. Fleas and ticks live nearly everywhere in the United States, though fleas reproduce more easily in warm, moist climates. The biggest problems with ticks have been in the South and North and on the Pacific and Gulf coasts.
4. Speed counts. Act as soon as you notice a flea infestation. Thoroughly vacuum carpets. Pull pillows and cushions from furniture and vacuum. Consider using boric-acid products, such as Borax or Flea-Stoppers Carpet Powder, on carpets and baseboards. Shampoo your dog, and comb out fleas and unattached ticks. Completely remove embedded ticks. Consult your veterinarian about over-the-counter and prescription products.