

Dog Breed Prone to Lyme Disease-Causing Bacteria

Swiss researchers say Bernese Mountain Dogs pick up a Lyme disease-causing bacteria more easily than other dogs.

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The bacteria known to be an agent of Lyme disease in dogs and humans, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, is particularly good at infecting Bernese Mountain Dogs, researchers from the University of Zurich, Switzerland, found.

More than half of the 160 Bernese Mountain Dogs they studied tested positive for the spiral-shaped bacteria, compared with only 15 percent of the control dogs, which were not Bernese but of comparable size and coat length.

The zoonotic, vector-borne disease is transmitted to a dog by an infected tick that feeds on the dog's blood for more than 36 to 48 hours. The small black-legged ticks pick up the bacteria from deer or small rodents that carry it naturally.

Neither living in a rural area where ticks might be more prevalent, more frequent outdoor activity, nor coat color – researchers assume darker coats make it harder for dog owners to spot ticks before they burrow in – explained the Bernese dogs' propensity for acquiring the bacteria, according to lead researcher Dr. Bernhard Gerber.

The Bernese, however, showed only a greater likelihood of acquiring antibodies to *B. burgdorferi* – meaning the dogs came in contact with the bacteria at some point – not necessarily a greater infection rate of Lyme disease.

"The findings in the present study are unique as infections with *B. burgdorferi* are not causing disease," said Gerber.

The scope of the study, which was published in the online journal "BMC Veterinary Research" on July 11, 2007, did not explore the exact cause behind the infections or the subsequent outcome.

Look out for Lyme Disease

The first sign of Lyme disease in your dog might be a circular rash at the bite site, followed by a fever, lethargy, or even lameness in a leg caused by muscle or joint pain.

If caught early, antibiotics can stop the disease before it takes hold.

During the spring and summer months when the young ticks are feeding and particularly dense, especially in wooded areas, frequently examine your dog for ticks or the small lumps that indicate their presence. An embedded tick can vary in size, ranging from pinhead to grape circumference. Brush your fingers through your dog's fur, applying pressure and checking even hard to reach spots.

Learn more about Bernese Mountain Dogs >>