

Lymes Disease

Lymes Disease has become a serious threat to dogs and their owners in recent years. First diagnosed in Lyme, Connecticut, this illness has now been reported in nearly every state and is becoming more widespread each year. After much research, it was determined that this bacterial illness is transmitted by the deer tick which is much smaller than the common brown dog tick.

Symptoms: The signs of infection in dogs and humans differ somewhat. Dogs develop a fever, are listless, reluctant to eat, and often have swollen lymph glands. Later the dog may develop joint stiffness, swelling, and pain much like arthritis. Kidney disease can also be a result of infection. People will first often develop a rash around the bite, accompanied by flu-like symptoms. Other problems that can develop are irregular heart rhythm, nervous system disorders, and arthritic symptoms.

Risks: Any person or pet that frequents wooded areas or open fields which would attract deer or field mice (another deer tick host) is at risk for infection. The bacteria can be picked up by the tick in any stage of its life cycle if the host animal is infected. Then when the tick moves on to another host it infects the latter through its bite which allows its digestive system to tap directly into the animal's bloodstream. Even though the deer tick prefers deer it will attach itself to any warm blooded animal.

Prevention: If you regularly dust your dog with flea and tick powder and brush him completely after being in the field, you will greatly reduce the risk of infection in your pet by removing any ticks that have not yet attached themselves to the dog. Also examine the dog for ticks that have become attached and carefully remove them. The tick is pin-head size when first attached and swells to the size of a kernel of corn when full. Do not squeeze the tick as that will inject the infected blood into the dog. Using tweezers pull the tick gently away from the skin. Dispose of the tick in alcohol. Then clean the wound thoroughly. For prevention of infection of humans the best choice is to wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, being certain that boots or sox cover the bottom of the pants so the ticks cannot come in contact with your ankles. There are several repellents on the market which are effective against ticks, but be sure to read the label carefully. Some are applied to the clothing and others can be applied to the skin. Most are not recommended for children and few are safe for dogs. Your vet can advise you if vaccination is advisable for your area.

Treatment: Because so many of the symptoms of Lymes Disease are similar to other medical problems it is often misdiagnosed. When properly identified early, treatment can be relatively simple. If the disease is left untreated there can be serious affects for the victim. Permanent joint damage and kidney disease are the results in dogs and in people there is joint damage, heart trouble, neurological problems, and possible birth defects.

