

Seneca Veterinary News

April 2012



Lyme Disease

What is lyme disease

Lyme disease is one of the most commonly diagnosed tick transmitted diseases in the world. It is caused by the spirochete (bacteria) called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The deer tick is the most common carrier of lyme disease. Deer ticks can vary in size which often makes them difficult to see. The nymph stage of the deer tick can be about the size of the head of a pin. The adult stage is much bigger and noticeable. Lyme disease can be transmitted by both the nymph and adult tick. Ticks have been growing in numbers over the past couple years due to the warmer winters. A higher number of ticks mean a greater chance of getting lyme disease. Since 2007, more than 40,000 dogs have tested positive to lyme disease.

Who can get Lyme Disease

Lyme disease can be transmitted to dogs, cats, cattle and other animals. People can also get lyme disease.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease in Pets

Once your pet is bitten by an infected tick, it may take 2 months or up to 5 months for symptoms to develop. They may become depressed or lose their appetite. They may also have swollen joints or lymph nodes. Another common sign is lameness. It often starts off mild and gradually worsens. The lameness may also switch from one leg to another. Ninety percent of dogs that have lyme disease never show signs. Lyme disease may also cause kidney disease in some pets.

Symptoms of Lyme Disease in People

The most common sign of a bite from a tick carrying lyme disease is a red “bulls-eye” rash. The rash usually appears about a week after the tick bite. Symptoms that may come later are severe headaches and neck stiffness, painful and swollen joints, pain that interferes with sleep and dizziness. Left untreated, lyme disease in people can lead to other major illnesses.

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Diagnosis of Lyme Disease in pets

Diagnosis of lyme disease is usually based on a thorough patient history. Has your pet had a tick, or been in a tick prone area in the past couple months? A blood test is also available that can determine if your pet has been exposed to lyme disease.

Treatment of Lyme Disease

A strong antibiotic is used to treat the bacteria that cause lyme disease. A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (such as Rimadyl) is also used to help with pain and inflammation caused by the disease. Although lyme disease may have been treated, it may not completely clear the bacteria. A reoccurrence is not uncommon.

Prevention of Lyme Disease

The only true way to prevent your pet from getting lyme disease is to keep the ticks off the animal. Check your pet daily, especially after they have been in an area with brush, woods, or tall grass. Many flea medications, such as Frontline Plus and Advantix, also help control ticks. A new product called Certifect is now on the market. It is supposed to start killing ticks much sooner than Frontline or Advantix. The longer a tick is on your pet, the greater the chance of getting lyme disease.

Another option for prevention is a vaccination against lyme disease. This is a series of two vaccinations a month apart. After this it would be a yearly booster. This along with your flea and tick medicine is your best prevention.

Removing a Tick

You can remove the tick at home with a pair of tweezers. Firmly grasp the tick where it attaches to the skin. Without jerking or twisting the tick, pull straight out. Make sure you get the head of the tick. Another method for removing ticks is the Tick Twister. It is a product made specifically to remove ticks. Slide the tick twister onto the tick, and twist the handle. By turning the handle, it slowly pulls the entire tick off your pet. Ticks are very hard to kill. Squishing or flushing ticks will not take care of them. The best way to make sure they do not reattach to your pet is to burn them once they are removed. Hold the tick with a pair of tweezers, and burn with a lighter or match.