

Client handout: 7 myths about Lyme disease

Consider this list of common myths about Lyme disease and learn the facts to protect your pet:

Myth 1: I don't live in a wooded area, so my pet can't get ticks.

Even if you think your pets don't visit areas where ticks are commonly found, such as wooded areas and places with high grass or brush, remember that ticks are actually able to live out their entire life cycle within your home. Woodpiles near or inside a home provide the perfect environment for ticks to survive. And when your pets are inside, this improves the environment for a tick's survival because ticks need readily available hosts.

It's also important to know that when small rodents such as mice are infested with ticks, they can enter the house, assisting the tick's transportation indoors. Even if ticks don't make their way into your home, they can still live in low grass and trees—such as the back yards of most suburban homes. When pets play in these areas, they are at risk of tick infestation.

Myth 2: I haven't seen any ticks on my pets, so they aren't at risk.

You may find ticks on your pets once they're engorged and visible to the naked eye. However, the tick's life cycle includes two stages, larva and nymph, where they're not as easily noticed. While you can remove adult ticks from their pets, you can't be sure that ticks haven't already laid eggs on the pets, continuing the tick infestation. Ticks in the larva and nymph stage need blood meals to grow into adult ticks, and the pet's coat is the perfect place to grow.

Myth 3: I've only found a few ticks on my pet, so I'm sure he's fine.

The phrase "it only takes one" fits perfectly to describe the risk of Lyme dis-

ease. While you may be diligent about checking for and removing ticks, it still only takes one tick bite for a pet to contract Lyme disease. When you find ticks on your pet, there's a good chance the pet has had other ticks you've missed. And even if you only find one tick, your veterinary team wants to protect the pet's well-being by testing for tick-borne diseases in the months following the bite.

Myth 4: I apply a flea and tick preventive to my pet monthly, so I don't need to worry about Lyme disease.

That's fantastic! Just remember, no product guarantees absolute protection. Depending on the pet's habits and environment, you may need to take additional steps to prevent Lyme disease.

For example, because each product is different, the doctor may recommend different application schedules, depending on the product and the pet. The veterinarian may also advise reapplying the product if the pet has been swimming or bathed, so it's a good idea to check with the veterinary team if your pet gets wet after an application. And the doctor may also suggest routine testing for tick-borne diseases and vaccinations against Lyme disease.

Myth 5: During the colder seasons, I don't need to worry about applying flea and tick prevention.

Because most insect populations decrease once cold weather sets in, you may assume ticks will follow suit. In reality, ticks are much hardier—and their population even peaks during the fall season. Ticks can also survive through the entire winter even when frozen in the ground. And occasional



thaws during winter may release these frozen ticks for another blood meal. For the best protection, continuously apply preventives throughout the year, including the colder months.

Myth 6: My pet was treated for Lyme disease, so now she's cured.

Once a pet is diagnosed with Lyme disease, the doctor usually prescribes an antibiotic. Once the antibiotic course is finished, this doesn't guarantee the Lyme disease is cured and the pet is no longer at risk of experiencing Lyme disease symptoms. The infection in many pets is widespread, and in some cases it may take multiple courses of the antibiotic to successfully treat the Lyme disease. When the doctor diagnoses Lyme disease, he or she may require quantitative tests after treatment to ensure complete treatment. Your pet should also continue to be routinely screened for tick-borne diseases every year.

Myth 7: My pet has already contracted Lyme disease, so he can't receive a Lyme disease vaccination.

Pets that have been treated for Lyme disease run the risk of reinfection. So it's important to continue applying preventives and check your pets for ticks.

Another way to prevent Lyme disease is to administer Lyme disease vaccination. Although there are more benefits to giving the vaccine before exposure occurs, such as with puppies, adult or seropositive dogs can receive the vaccination to help prevent the pet reinfection.

Source: Ciera Miller, CVT