

## **Lyme disease (*Borreliosis*)**

TICKS ARE GROSS! And over the past few years it seems like they are everywhere. Even though the snow has barely melted, we have been plucking them off of pets left and right during appointments lately. The worst part of it is they have the potential to transmit a number of diseases. Just to name a few: Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Anaplasma, Erlichia, and Tick Paralysis. The most common and most prevalent tick-borne disease in our area is Borreliosis, a bacterial infection known more commonly as **Lyme disease**.

We have been dealing with a record number of cases of Lyme in dogs. Many cases are found incidentally through a blood screening test which is recommended yearly for ALL dogs. The majority of dogs with evidence of Lyme in their blood are not showing signs of illness and we are happy to have caught it so that it may be treated, because otherwise the bacteria may progress to cause severe illness down the road. However, we do see a number of dogs who present to our hospital due to suffering from lameness because of joint pain and swelling, or anorexia, fever, or “just not acting him/herself” due to Lyme disease. In worse cases, we find that it is affecting the dog’s neurological system or kidneys. A dog with Lyme can be treated with antibiotics and progress is monitored through blood tests at certain intervals.

Just as humans contract Lyme through a tick bite, dogs can only get Lyme from being bitten by a tick carrying the bacteria. Most commonly it is the Deer Tick (the *Ixodes* tick). As far as we currently know, a person cannot contract Lyme directly from their infected pet. It is also curious that cats do not seem to be affected by Lyme the way dogs and humans are.

Can Lyme be prevented? **YES!** But no single modality can be 100% effective on its own, and diligence is needed every year. Lyme vaccines are available for dogs. As with any vaccine, it cannot promise 100% protection but is considered a very good vaccine. It can be started as young as 9 weeks of age. We also encourage that every dog has a 4DX blood screen (for Lyme, Anaplasma, Erlichia and Heartworm). We encourage all dogs to have monthly tick preventives applied topically, in the form of spot-on treatments and/or tick collars. Nothing can substitute for daily grooming of your dog to monitor for ticks on their body, as no topical product can provide 100% safety! If a tick is found, removal has to be performed very carefully. We recommend having a Tick Twister apparatus on hand (available at pet stores and most veterinary hospitals). Above all else, call your veterinarian if you find ticks on your pet and would like guidance, and call your human healthcare provider if you are finding ticks on yourself or your family.

Next article’s topic: **WORMS!** And other gastrointestinal parasites.