

# Help dogs avoid ticks and Lyme disease

With increased awareness of ticks and tick-borne diseases, many dog and puppy owners are rightfully concerned about avoiding ticks. Although no tick preventative is 100% effective, and no chemical preventative is free of health risks, most of them do decrease the number of tick bites a dog receives, and that cuts down on the risk of diseases such as Lyme. Removing a tick as soon as possible also lowers the chances of infection, since most tick-borne diseases take at least several hours to be transmitted.

Although it's important to be aware of ticks and the diseases they carry, it's also important to remember that not all ticks carry disease, and not all tick bites mean a dog will get sick.

"While 75% of dogs in our area will test positive for Lyme disease, that doesn't mean the dogs are sick," Dr. Morgan points out. She explains that a dog with a healthy immune system often successfully fights off the disease, just like humans can do when exposed to a cold or any other virus.

"Many dogs carry the antibodies only because they've been exposed, and even dogs who have had a Lyme vaccination will test positive for antibodies," explains Dr. Morgan.

The first line of defense is to avoid tick-infested areas, and that can start right at home if you have a yard. Keep the grass mowed short, plantings tidy, and weeds cut down. Shady, overgrown areas are inviting to all sorts of critters from mice, rabbits, and squirrels to groundhogs and deer out in the suburbs. All mammals and even birds can carry ticks in any of their life stages, so keeping the yard as free of wildlife as possible and a dog away from wildlife territory is a good idea.

While visiting parks or any area with an abundance of brush and trees or forest, keeping to a well-worn trail can help both dogs and their people avoid ticks. While at the shore, avoid the dunes and any area with sea grass or other vegetation. Ticks don't jump or fly, so dogs have to get pretty close for a tick to get on them. Whether a dog is trail-blazing or bush-whacking, he should be checked for ticks as often as possible while out and about. Large ticks are often easily visible, especially on light-coated dogs, before they have a chance to sink their mouthparts in and can be removed quickly.

After an excursion, the dog or puppy should be thoroughly checked all over for ticks, especially in and around the ears, where legs meet the body (the armpits, so to speak, and groin area), between the toes, and any area where there's little or no hair on the dog, and especially in skin folds. Remove a tick carefully by grasping it as close to the mouth as possible with tweezers and pulling gently. Here's a [good guide to tick removal](#).

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