

What Lyme disease means for your dog

Carried by some ticks, this illness is preventable and treatable if caught early. This handout with information from the American Veterinary Medical Association covers the basics.

What's Lyme disease?

Lyme disease (Lyme borreliosis) is an illness that affects both animals and humans. Transmitted through tick bites, the disease can be difficult to detect and can cause serious and recurring health problems. Therefore, it's best to prevent infection by taking appropriate measures to prevent tick bites and, for dogs, possibly vaccinating against the disease.

Named after numerous cases were identified in Lyme, Connecticut, in 1975, the disease has since been reported in humans and animals across the United States and around the world. Within the U.S., it appears primarily in specific areas including the southern New England states; eastern Mid-Atlantic states; the upper Midwest, particularly Wisconsin and Minnesota; and on the West Coast, particularly northern California.

How do we prevent it?

The best way to protect pets from Lyme disease is to take preventive measures to reduce the chance of contracting the disease. Even during the last weeks of summer, it's important to remember that pets and people are at greater risk of being infected with Lyme disease and other tick-borne diseases such as anaplasmosis, ehrlichiosis or Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

People with pets should:

- Use reliable tick-preventive products. Speak with your veterinarian about what tick preventive product is right for your pet.
- Work with your veterinarian to

decide whether to vaccinate your dog against Lyme disease. Your veterinarian's advice may depend on where you live, your pet's lifestyle and overall health, and other factors.

- When possible, avoid areas where ticks might be found. These include tall grasses, marshes and wooded areas.
- Check for ticks on both yourself and your animals once indoors.
- Clear shrubbery next to homes.
- Keep lawns well maintained.

How do we diagnose it?

Pets infected with Lyme disease may not show any signs for two to five months.

After that time, typical signs include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Lameness
- Joint swelling
- Decreased activity

Recurrent lameness also is possible, and the involved extremity may be tender. Inflammation of the joint can last from days to weeks, and may migrate from one extremity to another.

Lyme disease is diagnosed through a blood test that shows whether an animal has been exposed to the bacterium.

How do we treat it?

Antibiotics usually provide effective treatment for Lyme disease. However, it's important to follow your veterinarian's advice regarding follow-up care after your pet has been diagnosed with and treated for the disease.



Lyme disease is a family affair

Because people and their pets often spend time in the same environments where Lyme and other disease-transmitting ticks are found, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) are working together to offer advice to households with both children and pets. People who have been diagnosed with Lyme disease should consult their veterinarian to determine their pet's risk based on the animal's lifestyle and possible environmental exposures. Likewise, people whose animals have been diagnosed with Lyme disease may want to consult their physician about their own or their children's risk if they have concerns that the animals and family members might have been exposed to similar environmental risks.

Thousands of cases of Lyme disease have been reported in humans and animals across the United States and around the world. By knowing about Lyme disease and how to prevent it, you can help keep all members of your family—human and animal—safe.