

How to Protect Your Pets from Fleas & Ticks

It's hard to believe that the summer is nearly over, that fall is rapidly approaching and that our kids will soon be back in school. Well, if you're thinking about taking a deep sigh of relief because you think that fleas and ticks will fade out of the scene like the hot summer sun, think twice. Although many people regard fleas and ticks as a summertime threat to their pets, these pests actually pose a year round hazard. Fighting fleas and ticks is no longer a seasonal battle. It requires year round attention and prevention.

Did you know that there are over 2,000 species of fleas and that they can transmit a vast array of diseases, most significantly tapeworms? Fleas are small wingless, bloodsucking insects that have legs adapted for jumping. Ticks are large fleas that are dark to light gray in color and attach themselves to animals or to humans (yeeech!). They are disease carriers that attach firmly to flesh and suck their host's blood. They are more closely related to spiders and have 8 legs.

Exposure to fleas and ticks commonly occurs in the woods or open fields or even in urban parks where there is an overgrowth of shrubs and undergrowth of weeds. If you are planning to take Rover for a hike in the woods, make sure he is protected by flea and tick preventive that is easily applied or ingested. Actually, your pet should be on a preventative flea/tick medication all year long. Consult with a veterinarian as to which type and brand are best suited to your pet's needs, size, health, breed and lifestyle.

Symptoms of flea manifestation are excessive itching, biting and chewing especially at the rear tail or the inside or outside of the thighs. Intense scratching can cause redness and irritation and inflammation as well as red bumps, skin lesions and ulcers. To determine if your pet has fleas, look for them crawling through your dog's fur – they are 2-8 mm long, a mahogany brown color and have three pairs of legs.

Symptoms of ticks on your pet may include: lethargy, fever, nausea, dizziness, diarrhea lameness or even bleeding. Ehrlichiosis is one of the diseases caused by ticks. Lyme disease as well as Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Anaplasmosis and Babesiosis are other tick-borne diseases. Most tick-borne diseases take several hours to transmit to the host. It is fairly easy to spot a tick on your animal. It may look like a red/brown ball or pea. Wood ticks and brown dog ticks are good examples of ticks that can be troublesome for dogs.

If your dog may be exposed to fleas or tick, act preventively. Shampoo/bathe him with a medicated flea and tick shampoo. Obtain a flea and tick collar from your vet. Put your pet on flea-tick medication in accordance with your vet's recommendations – this usually involves a monthly topical application or pill to be ingested. Implement a flea/tick prevention program that treats not just your dog but also the environment in which he lives. Make sure his bedding is clean, well maintained and free of dirt and pests. Take your dog for regular visits to the vet. Keep your garden well-manicured (no weeds or overgrown shrubs). Consult with your vet about chemicals and safe, appropriate and on-

going preventive medications and treatments. Ideally, tick and flea prevention will become a part of your regular dog care and maintenance schedule!