



Ticks

Ticks are not insects but arachnids like spiders. They are also one of the most efficient carriers of disease; they attach firmly, suck blood slowly, and often go unnoticed for a while.

Ticks take several days to complete feeding. During this time, they are transmitting diseases to you or your pets.

Life Cycle

Female ticks deposit 3,000 to 6,000 eggs on the ground. Eggs hatch into tiny larvae that feed on animals (or people). The larvae molt into larger nymphs that also feed. Then the nymphs molt into adults. Adults feed on animals (females more than males) and the female mates and lays eggs after feeding.



Ticks climb to the tips of grasses and shrubs (they do not climb trees) and wait for a passing animal or human to go by. They climb onto their host, find a good place to settle in, and start to feed.

Ticks bite into the skin with their mouthparts. They do not burrow their heads into the skin. They also secrete a substance called cementum that sticks their mouth to the skin. This prevents them from being easily dislodged and allows them to continue feeding for days. Ticks can survive up to two years without food. They are made for survival!

Species

Three species of ticks infest dogs and cats in Illinois as well as humans. Another tick is only a threat to dogs.

The four species are the American dog tick, lone star tick, blacklegged tick (also called deer tick), and the brown dog tick.



The larvae, nymph, and adults of each species will feed on different types of animals. They carry different diseases and one tick may carry more than one disease.

All of the species, besides the brown dog tick, are most active in spring (April – June). The blacklegged tick is also very active in fall. There will still be some activity at other times of the year as well. Some ticks can be active during the winter.

The brown dog tick feeds on dogs but rarely on people or cats. This is the only tick that likes to live in homes or kennels and does not survive as well outdoors.

Diseases

Ticks can transmit a number of diseases to our pets and us. These include Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, ehrlichiosis, Lyme disease, babesiosis, anaplasmosis, and bartonellosis.

Ticks can also cause a condition called tick paralysis from a toxin in their saliva.

All of these can be very serious. Taking precautions to prevent ticks from biting in the first place is critical.

Prevention

Ticks are much harder to kill than fleas so not all flea products will kill ticks. Not every tick product kills every species of tick either. You must read labels carefully to know if your pet is protected. Treat your pets year round and be careful not to miss any doses.

If you find a tick on your pet, remove it properly. Use a tweezers to grab the tick next to the skin. With a slow steady pressure, pull the tick straight out. Do not twist it. Don't use a hot match to try to get it to release. It can't because it's stuck with the cementum, and it will regurgitate any diseases into the skin.

Ticks are creepy but nature designed them well. They are very efficient at getting blood and passing along diseases. Tick protection for all pets is a must-have medication.

