



What's Making Fido Itch?

Now that the weather has become warmer, our focus turns toward the outdoors. As spring approaches, we begin to head outdoors and spend more time outside. Not only will the spring season bring lush green grass, trees and lovely spring flowers but also fleas and ticks. The warmer months and temperate weather send signals to dormant fleas and ticks that it is time to reawaken. Because fleas and ticks can be passed on to us from our pets, we need to understand why it is important to treat our pets when they become infested and the differences in treatments available to us.

Fleas and ticks are usually found in high grasses, bushes, overgrown vegetation and in areas where it is damp, warm and humid. Since your dog can come in contact with these pests just about everywhere, it is important to check them regularly. Fleas prefer our pets as their fur provides warmth and camouflage for their breeding ground. They are also adaptable and can live very well indoors. Once you notice fleas on your dog, there are probably many more living in your carpet, furniture, dog/cat beds, corners, or cracks. Not only are they a nuisance to you and your dog, fleas can also be harmful to your dog's health. A common symptom of flea infestation is excessive scratching. This is due to the fleas biting your dog and their crawling over their skin. While most dogs scratch and bite themselves, some are extremely allergic to fleabites. These dogs will respond by developing a rash, inflammation, and hair loss. Other symptoms of fleabites may include the following:

- Anemia in young, older or ill dogs characterized by pale gums, weakness, and lethargy.
- Transmission of tapeworm to dogs; fleas carry tapeworm eggs that are then introduced into your dog when he swallows the fleas from biting at his skin.

There are various products available for getting rid of fleas and your veterinarian can help you choose which product is best for you. To get rid of fleas, you can start by washing your dog's bedding, blankets and toys as well as vacuuming frequently to help keep the flea population down. Sprinkling a flea-ridding product for carpets before vacuuming can also help kill the fleas in the vacuum bag. Remember to change the vacuum bag after vacuuming.

Like the flea, ticks are also an annoyance. However they can carry and transmit diseases to your dog and also to you. Ticks may affect your pet's health in the following ways:

- Lyme Disease: a bacterial infection that can infect both dogs and people. Symptoms include lameness, fever, loss of appetite, fatigue, and an abnormal enlargement of the lymph nodes.

- Babesiosis: acute symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, and general deterioration. In puppies 4-12 weeks old, shock, coma or death can occur after less than a day of lethargy.
- Ehrlichiosis: an infectious blood disease that cripples your pet's immune system. Symptoms include fever, depression, weight loss, and loss of appetite.
- Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever: transmitted by the American dog tick. Symptoms include fever, loss of appetite, coughing, lameness, depression, vomiting and diarrhea.

If you notice that your dog is suffering from any of these ailments and you've recently visited an area known to harbor ticks, then consult your veterinarian as soon as possible. Many of these illnesses are treatable and can be cured if caught early in the disease.

Once you have discovered that your pet has a tick, it must be removed immediately. This is important as it takes several hours for an infected Tick to transmit disease. The best method to remove a tick is to use fine-pointed tweezers. Before removing the tick, it is recommended that you clean your hands, the bite site, and tweezers with a disinfectant. Using the tweezers, grab the tick as closely to the skin as possible and pull straight back using steady but gentle force. You never want to remove a tick with your fingers. This may cause you to twist the tick off leaving the head still embedded, or through squeezing the tick, you cause it to regurgitate more of its infected fluids into the bite site. It is not recommended that you crush, prick, or burn the tick, as these methods do not work. Also, applying nail polish, alcohol, petroleum jelly or mineral oil to the tick does not work. Ticks can store enough oxygen to complete their feeding. Once the tick is removed, the proper method to dispose of it is to place it in sealed container or plastic bag. Then throw the container in the trash. The plastic bag or container lacks humidity, which the tick needs to survive. Also, do not flush the tick down the toilet as they can easily survive in the water. If you are unsure about removing a tick from your dog, call your vet.

After removing any and all ticks from your dog, you should determine where your pet got the tick(s). This will help you to decide which treatment option(s) you will have to take in order to protect your dog from ticks. You may have to treat your dog and your home and yard or you may only have to treat your dog before or after a trip to tick infested areas. To prevent ticks from inhabiting your yard, mow regularly to keep grass short. Also, remove any mulch or leaf litter and keep your bushes trimmed. If you already have an infestation, you can either treat the yard yourself or call in a professional. To further prevent your dog from being infested with ticks examine them regularly especially after you've been in an area known to harbor ticks. Ticks like to attach themselves to your dog's head, neck, and paws. However, you should examine your dog from nose to tail in order to cover as much of his body as possible.

When it comes to protecting our dogs from fleas and ticks, we have an assortment of treatments at our disposal. There are powders, shampoos, collars, mousses, sprays, topical applications, and pills. It can be overwhelming and difficult to choose which product is best. If you are uncertain as to how to proceed, your veterinarian is the best person to ask and a good place to start. They can tell you which product to use, how to use it properly and also demonstrate how the product works if there are any questions.