

LYME DISEASE (BORRELIOSIS)



What Causes It

Lyme disease is a tick-borne bacterial disease which affects both humans and animals. The disease is caused by bacteria called *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

How is it Transmitted

It is transmitted to humans and dogs following a bite from an infected tick. It's the most common tick borne disease in Europe, and the number of reported human cases has risen dramatically in the UK in recent years. A recent survey showed that 15% of dogs are carrying ticks, unknown to their owners, **the risk to our pets can't be ignored.**

Which Dogs Are At Risk?

Ticks are found practically everywhere, although their numbers are usually higher in areas, such as woodland, moorland and rough pasture and in town and country parks, especially larger parks where deer are present. If your dogs are walked regularly in these areas, they could be at significant risk of picking up an infected tick.

Signs and Symptoms Of Lyme Disease.

The disease is transmitted by an infected tick which then takes blood from the dog. It can then take up to 48 hours for the disease to be transmitted to the dog. Infection does not cause any harmful effects to some dogs, but in others, a variety of signs can be seen.

The most common signs are:-

- fever
- lethargy
- losing interest in food
- lameness and joint swellings

The disease can also affect the nervous system and the heart and in rare cases, serious kidney problems can develop which are very difficult to treat.

These signs can take a long time to develop, sometimes several months after a dog is bitten, by an infected tick.

Diagnosis

The symptoms can be very similar to those of other disease, so diagnosis can be difficult, but blood tests to measure immunity levels to *Borrelia* can be useful. Other tests, are available which can detect the bacteria in tissue samples, such as skin or joint tissue.

Treatment usually consists of antibiotics, plus anti-inflammatory drugs to control the painful lameness which can be present. Although treatment usually gives rapid results in the short term, it is very difficult to get rid of the bacteria, and relapses can occur. Prevention is certainly better than cure.

Prevention.

There are several steps you can take to reduce the risk of Lyme disease for your dog.

- vaccination is an important way of protecting your pet and a vaccine against Lyme disease has recently become available in the UK.
- reducing exposure to ticks is also important.
- using an appropriate tick control product is essential.
- avoiding high risk areas, particularly during periods of peak tick activity during Spring and Autumn, can help.
- carefully examining your dog after walks to identify and then remove ticks is important, as removal of ticks within 48 hours of attachment helps to reduce the risk of disease transmission.

Prevention is covered fully in the “**PREVENTION OF DISEASES IN DOGS**” factsheet

Don't forget that Lyme disease can affect humans too, so take appropriate steps to protect yourself against ticks, such as covering up exposed skin and checking yourself carefully for ticks.