

# **Pet owners beware, it's always tick season on Cape Cod**

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## **Learning to detect Lyme disease symptoms in your pet could prevent serious medical issues**

By Gerald Rogovin  
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Pet owners who live here and visitors to Cape Cod face the prospect of an elevated Lyme disease risk this summer.

That is the estimate of David Simser, Deer Tick Project coordinator of the Cape Cod Cooperative Extension. He described an experience two weekends ago that led to his conclusion.

### **Tick population growing**

Surveying for deer ticks in the Punkhorn area near the Harwich-Brewster line, he was picking up about 300 ticks in an hour. He does so with a wool towel tied to a broomstick, which he sweeps along the ground.

"Typically, I spot 50 to 75 deer ticks in an hour in a wooded area," he said.

Panelists Tuesday evening at the Orleans Citizens Forum at Orleans Town Hall generally agreed that the onset of the tick season, normally mid-May to mid-August, was of concern to them. Forum moderator George R. Heufelder, director of the Barnstable County Department of Health & Environment, backed Simser's estimates, saying they are the most precise survey of the area.

### **48 hours for a dog to become infected**

It takes about 48 hours for a dog to become infected after being bitten by a deer tick when the mite is attached to the dog, according to Robert A. Labdon, a DVM with Veterinary Associates of Cape Cod and a panelist.

Dogs residing here, or which have traveled to the Cape with their vacationing families are more susceptible to bites by black-legged ticks and deer ticks infected with the disease. They account for about 20 percent of all the ticks in the area each year.

### **Learn to detect symptoms**

Knowing how to detect Lyme disease symptoms in your pet will help to prevent serious, even deadly medical conditions, according to the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"The disease is still quite controversial," said Labdon. "There are many who deny its existence because there is still a lot of interpretation of results. There is rarely a 'yes' or 'no' answer because we still don't have a test to diagnose Lyme every time," he added.

### **Symptoms mimic rheumatoid arthritis**

Still, he suggests staying aware of symptoms in animals that mimic rheumatoid arthritis. "That means you have to watch for limping, sore and painful feet and legs. Swelling of joints is common. "You need," he emphasized, "to check for swelling of the lymph node in the affected leg."

Lethargy, confusion, nervousness, other unexplained changes in the animal's behavior are all conditions to watch for after a tick bite. If infected with Lyme Disease, a dog could develop a fever of 103 to 105 degrees F.

### **Twice-daily checks for all**

For all these clues, Labdon recommended twice-daily checks of family pets, inspection and removal of ticks. These are essential because severe symptoms of Lyme Disease include kidney failure, Encephalitis, Myocardia and Meningitis.

Lyme disease is a year-round problem in the area, according to Simser. The period May 15-August 15 is the most severe.

Labdon and Internet websites cite Frontline and K-9 Advantix as the most effective tick repellents. But all agree consulting a veterinarian is desirable. They also suggest removing ticks immediately upon discovery on a pet's body. All agree that using a tick repellent containing Permethrin on a cat could be fatal.

Gerald Rogovin began as a journalist in 1948 in dailies, weeklies, radio and magazines; and in the past 9 years back to weeklies and magazines. In between, for 36 years, he headed his own public relations firm in Boston. He lives in Yarmouth Port with a skepticism confirmed by 60 years in the inky trade.

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