

Time for Ticks.....

A while ago I was called to the waiting room to see a passing gentleman who had a problem with ticks. Nothing to do with an animal, this man had ticks all over his legs. He has been out walking in a field, wearing shorts, and the ticks had jumped out of the grass and attached themselves to his legs. He had at least 50, of varying sizes, which gradually fill up with blood before falling off again to continue their development. Now while the tick bite itself may cause some irritation it is the possibility of the tick spreading disease that is more of a problem. Lyme disease can cause severe problems in humans, as well as dogs, and other serious tick borne disease are now being found in the UK that at one time only occurred in warmer climes. The gentleman in the waiting room, wanting to buy a spray to kill the ticks on his legs, was swiftly despatched to the local doctors surgery!

Borreliosis (Lyme Disease)



A dog with borreliosis

Borreliosis is caused by bacteria called *Borrelia*. Several species of this organism exist in Europe and all cause disease when transmitted to dogs and humans (and, less commonly, to cats, and horses). These organisms are adapted to live in rodent and wildlife reservoirs in which they cause no apparent problems. However, when ticks which harbour the organisms bite an animal, the bacteria are transmitted into the host with tick saliva and multiply in the bloodstream.

It appears that only certain types of ticks (known as *Ixodes*) can transmit *Borrelia*. Unfortunately the most common UK tick, the sheep tick (*Ixodes ricinus*), is one of these.



In dogs Lyme disease usually causes typical signs of arthritis affecting up to 5 joints. Episodes of lameness typically last only a few days, although repeat episodes may occur. There may be fever and enlarged lymph node. Lyme disease has also been associated with a rapidly progressive kidney failure and the risk of this appears to be higher in Labradors and Golden Retrievers as well as Bernese Mountain Dogs .

Diagnosis may be difficult and normally depends of evidence of exposure along with clinical signs and diagnostic tests (usually blood tests).



The point of tick-attachment with the spreading circular rash which is characteristic of Lyme disease.

In humans the typical disease progression is a red rash around the tick bite which resolves and is followed by flu-like symptoms and arthritis. In animals the rash is not usually observed and the first signs of illness are that the animal appears "off-colour"; this lethargy and anorexia is often accompanied by lameness due to arthritic changes in the joints.

The infection is managed with antibiotic therapy but prevention is better than cure - evidence suggests that the ticks do not infect their host for 24 to 72 hours post-attachment. Removal of the ticks in this time frame should forestall the disease as would use of an effective tick-killing preparation. It is best not to apply anything directly to the tick (as many old wives tails advise) as this may make it contract and inject any disease it harbours directly into the animals blood stream.

You can obtain an effective tick remover from your Veterinary Surgeon who can also prescribe one of the many excellent products to deter ticks from attaching to your pet and killing those that do. Do not delay, seek

advice now, this year has seen a large increase in the number of ticks on animals and there is always a rise in their population in the autumn.

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