

## What You Need to Know About Ticks

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Our area of the Gulf Coast is beautiful and rich with plant and animal life. With so many domestic and wild animals at our doorstep, ticks have also made this area home to take advantage of the abundant food supply. In addition to feeding on us and our pets, ticks can transmit serious and sometimes difficult to diagnose illnesses. According to the CDC, at least 16 different diseases in the United States alone can be transmitted to humans by ticks. A few of the Tick Borne diseases that have been diagnosed in Escambia and Santa Rosa County are Lyme Disease, Ehrlichia, and Anaplasmosis. For more info on these diseases in humans, visit [www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/index.html) . For more info on how to avoid, prevent, and remove ticks from your pets, please continue to read below.

Ticks are often present year round but expect and prepare for greater numbers during spring and summer. Areas with frequent wildlife traffic will likely experience higher tick numbers. Lawns, back yards, and wild areas that have tall grass and/or low hanging branches or shrubs make it easy for lurking ticks to hitch a ride with a passing animal that unknowingly brushes against the vegetation. Many animals including mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians can carry ticks. Some common examples include dogs, cats, deer, rabbits, squirrels , fox, raccoons, snakes, and even bats.



If it is not possible for your pets to avoid these areas, or if you have seen ticks on your pet before then it may be time for some tick prevention. A number of different topical, internal, environmental, and natural products exist for this purpose.

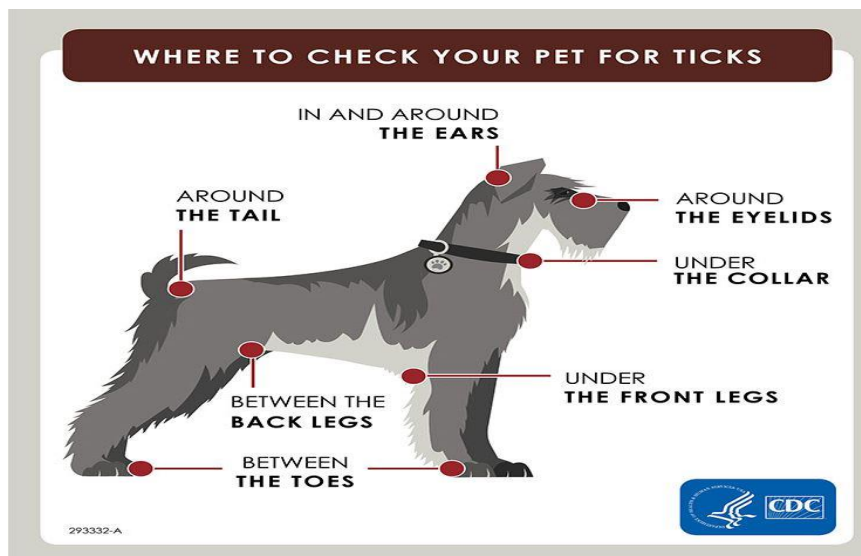
Natural tick preventions typically use ingredients like citronella and lemon oil applied topically to the pet's coat to repel any ticks from attaching. These products are short acting and less effective than either topical or internal tick preventions and are likely better at repelling mosquitos than ticks, but on the plus side, they generally smell pleasant. Make sure that the product you are using is labeled for the correct species as pets often ingest these topical products by licking or grooming their hair coat. This is especially important in cats as they cannot process certain essential oils and can develop liver failure if ingested.

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Topical tick preventions are applied monthly to the back of the neck or in collar form and are generally moderately effective as well as moderately safe. Many topicals contain Pyrethrins or Pyrethroids which work well but may cause toxicity even in some properly dosed canine patients and tend to be quite toxic to cats. This is especially important in mixed cat and dog households where feline patient(s) may come in contact with or ingest some of the undried product or chew on a tick collar applied to their canine housemate. I have also witnessed many severe and sometimes fatal toxicities when the canine versions of these products are inadvertently applied to cats. Other topical tick preventions contain fipronil which may be safer when used on or around cats. Again, check and follow the package labeling carefully to make sure you are applying a product that is appropriate for the weight and species being treated.

Internal tick preventions are given either by mouth or applied as a transdermal liquid to the back of the neck which delivers the medication into the bloodstream. This category of preventions are the quickest acting and most effective. These medications have a good safety profile and some last up to 3 months and some can even be safely given to pregnant and nursing pets. Drawbacks are a higher price tag and most of the medications in this category should be avoided in pets that suffer from seizure disorders.

Because of the variety of preventions available and each pet's unique medical and environmental circumstances, your veterinarian is most qualified to help you choose which prevention is best.



There are a few environmental steps that can also help prevent ticks in your area. First make sure that trees and shrubs are trimmed regularly and the grass is kept

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manicured and not overgrown. Monthly sprays or granular products may be applied to the areas used by your pets. Pest control companies usually offer this service and home improvement stores offer DIY versions as well..

So what should you do if you find a tick on your pet? Pets should be checked for ticks after any potential exposure to a tick friendly environment. This may mean tick inspections after walks on trails or in an open field or may necessitate nightly pat downs. The goal is to intercept any tick that might otherwise enter into your house and possibly start an infestation as well as to reduce the chance of disease transmission. Ticks must be attached for 2-12 hours in order to transfer any diseases they may be harboring. So the sooner the tick is removed the less chance of pathogenic micro-organisms infecting your pet. I have seen several different removal techniques on-line including a few commercially designed tick removers. I prefer to apply rubbing alcohol directly onto the tick and the immediate surrounding area. This helps disinfect the area, and in my opinion, causes the tick loosen their attachment slightly. Wait 30 to 45 seconds then grab the tick as close to the skin as possible with your fingernails or a pair of tweezers. Do not squeeze too tightly as this will crush the tick and make it more difficult to remove all the head and mouth parts. Apply gentle but sustained upward pressure parallel to the body of the tick until the skin is slightly tented and hold for 5 to 10 seconds. Do not twist. The tick should release from the skin with all the head and mouth parts intact.



In dogs and cats a small nodule may persist for 2 to 4 weeks at the tick attachment

site but should get progressively smaller. If the lesion enlarges, becomes red or painful at or around the attachment site please alert your veterinarian. If you have comments, question, or suggestions you may contact my staff or I at Pine Meadow Veterinary Clinic. 850-477-2194. We are located at 550 W. 9 Mile Rd. Lance Coy, D.V.M.

