

CANINE HEALTH ALERT. . . CANINE HEALTH ALERT. . . CANINE HEALTH ALERT

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CANINE LYME DISEASE CASES DIAGNOSED IN RIDGEWOOD

The veterinarians at the Ridgewood Veterinary Hospital have already diagnosed several cases of Lyme Disease here in Ridgewood this season. Since ticks, which transmit the disease, are not usually seen in such abundance until later in the summer and fall, this indicates an increasingly serious problem threatening the area. Therefore, we are recommending that all dogs in Ridgewood should be tested and vaccinated for Lyme Disease. Below are the answers to the most commonly asked questions regarding Lyme Disease. During the months of June and July, we have arranged a special clinic discount with our laboratory for the Lyme Disease Test. While testing is not mandatory prior to vaccination, it is strongly recommended to be sure your dog has not been exposed to Lyme Disease. The tick that carries the disease is no larger than a pencil point, and often feeds and drops off undetected. We have enclosed a free tick identification card, which illustrates ticks and lists some common signs of Lyme Disease. Please call our office to schedule an appointment for your dog to be tested and vaccinated as soon as possible.

WHAT IS LYME DISEASE?

Lyme Disease was first recognized in 1975 as the cause of an unusual cluster of cases of inflammatory arthritis in children in Old Lyme, Connecticut. Thus the name Lyme Disease. It is caused by a bacteria in the spirochete family named *Borrelia burgdorferi*: thus another name for the disease is Borreliosis. The disease has now been reported in humans and animals in many states, including New York, New Jersey, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

HOW CAN YOU OR YOUR PET GET LYME DISEASE?

The bacteria that causes Lyme Disease is transmitted by the bite of the deer tick. Seventy percent of all Lyme Disease cases occur from the bite of the immature (nymph) deer tick. First, the tick must bite an animal infected with the organism and become infected itself. When the tick bites another animal, it infects that animal in turn.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF LYME DISEASE IN ANIMALS?

There are three main signs of infection in animals: fever, loss of appetite, and most importantly, lameness. Some dogs may get swollen lymph nodes and a small number may also develop kidney disease, central nervous system disease or heart problems. The lameness is the result of arthritis that may involve any joint or any number of joints. The lameness may also shift from

one limb to another intermittently. The joints may appear hot and swollen, but x-rays can appear to be normal.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF LYME DISEASE IN PEOPLE?

In humans, the disease often starts out as a circular rash around the original tick bite, called erythema chronicum migrans, within one or two weeks of the exposure. Flu-like symptoms including aches, fever, and lethargy usually coincide with the rash. These symptoms will usually resolve within three weeks. After this, there are a number of different chronic syndromes possible, the most common being arthritis.

HOW CAN WE DIAGNOSE LYME DISEASE?

A history of tick exposure and clinical signs help us to suspect the disease. The rash that is commonly seen in people is usually not seen in dogs or cats, so we must depend on other indicators of disease. If exposed, the animal's immune system will mount a response to the bacteria. This immune response can be measured with a blood test, but may take two weeks to become apparent. Because of this, a veterinarian may want to wait to blood test your pet, or may test immediately followed by a repeat blood test two weeks later, in order to detect a change in the response of the animal's immune system to the organism. Now, many clinics are testing animals on a routine basis because signs of the disease may not manifest for up to three years after exposure and many times the initial tick bite goes unnoticed.

HOW CAN WE TREAT LYME DISEASE?

There are a number of agents that have been used to treat Lyme Disease in both humans and their pets. Tetracycline is usually the drug of choice. Amoxicillin and erythromycin have also been used effectively. The choice of drug and the appropriate amount and duration of treatment must be assessed by the veterinarian in each individual case.

IS THERE ANY WAY TO PREVENT THE DISEASE FROM OCCURRING?

Deer ticks must feed for an average of 18 hours before they begin transmission of the Lyme Disease bacteria, if infected. It is therefore imperative to remove ticks as soon as possible. To remove a tick, spray the tick with flea and tick spray, then wait 15 – 20 minutes. Grasp it as close to the skin as possible with a tweezers and pull straight up and away from the skin. Thoroughly disinfect the area that the tick was removed from and be careful in handling the tick that has been removed. Wear gloves and put the tick in alcohol or flush it down the toilet. Periodic treatment with products designed to kill fleas and ticks will also help eliminate any ticks that are missed. Our veterinarians will recommend products for your dog's individual needs.

CAN I PROTECT MY DOG AGAINST LYME DISEASE?

Administering Lyme Disease vaccine can provide significant protection. Having your dog wear a Preventic collar will cause the tick to be paralyzed in the mouthparts and drop off before transmitting the disease.

CAN CATS AND OTHER ANIMALS GET LYME DISEASE?

Lyme Disease is seen much less frequently in cats and other animals. Cats can be tested for Lyme Disease, but to date there is not a vaccination against Lyme Disease for cats. Prevention is encouraged with the use of flea and tick products, and your veterinarian can discuss which products offer the best protection against ticks for cats.