

Myths vs. facts: The truth about ticks

Make sure parasites have no place on your pets.

Disease-carrying ticks pose health risks to dogs and people, no matter where you live. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that ticks in every U.S. state carry diseases, and the number of tick-borne diseases is increasing. But do you know the myths and facts about ticks? Here, DogsAndTicks.com debunks some of the most commonly believed myths about ticks so you can protect your pets.

Myth # 1: *The best way to remove a tick is with a lit match, fingernail polish, or petroleum jelly.*

Fact: None of these methods cause the tick to “back out,” and all of them may actually result in the tick depositing more disease-carrying saliva into the wound, increasing the risk of infection. The best way to remove a tick is to grasp it as close to the skin as possible with tweezers and pull the tick’s body out with a steady motion. Wear rubber gloves, and clean the skin with soap and water after removal. Dispose of the tick by placing it in alcohol or flushing it down the toilet.

Myth #2: *Lyme disease is the only illness that ticks can transmit to dogs and humans.*

Fact: Lyme is the most widely known and common tick disease, but there are many others that ticks carry and can transmit to dogs and people. These include

Rocky Mountain spotted fever, anaplasmosis (sometimes known as “dog fever”), ehrlichiosis, and some emerging diseases with potentially devastating effects.



Myth #3: *If I find a tick on myself or someone in my family, a simple blood test will tell me if I have Lyme disease or not.*

Fact: The current recommendation of the CDC is a two-step process to detect evidence of antibodies against the bacteria that causes Lyme disease—both steps are performed on the same blood sample. The first step is an enzyme immunoassay (EIA) or, less often, an indirect immunofluorescence assay (IFA). If this first step is negative, the CDC doesn’t recommend further testing. If it’s positive or indeterminate (sometimes called “equivocal”), the second step is an immunoblot test, commonly called a “Western blot.” Results are considered positive only if the EIA/IFA and the immunoblot are both positive.

Myth #4: *Ticks aren’t a problem in the winter when it’s too cold for them to live outside.*

Fact: In most areas of the country, high season for ticks runs from April to November. Experts recommend the use of preventives year-round, however, as infection can occur at any time of the year. In the winter, for example, some tick species move indoors and are in closer contact with pets and people, while others make a type of antifreeze to survive during the winter months.

Myth #5: *Ticks live in trees, so as long as I don’t live near or visit a wooded area, I don’t have to worry about them.*

Fact: Ticks actually live on the ground no matter the locale, be it an urban park or a rural area. They typically crawl up from grass blades onto a host and migrate upward, which is why they’re often found on the scalp.

Myth #6: *Ticks are insects.*

Fact: Ticks are actually a species of parasite called arachnids that belong to the same family as mites. Since signs of tick-borne disease are difficult to recognize in both pets and people, simple preventive measures and understanding as much as possible about these creepy crawlers are the best ways to keep everyone safe.