

Quality Care Animal Hospital
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Tick Borne Diseases In Southern Illinois

Each area of the country has roughly a half dozen or so local tick species present. The species vary depending on what part of the country one lives in and likewise the diseases those ticks carry also varies.

For some parts of the country the dominant tick borne disease is Lyme disease cause by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Other area of the country have Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

Every canine heartworm test that we do at our hospital also tests for a variety of tick borne diseases. We have been doing these tests for many years and it has corroborated what research tells us. The predominant tick borne disease in Southern Illinois is Ehrlichia. Dogs get it and so can people. People get the disease the same way that dogs do - by having a tick that carries the bacteria attach and feed.

When a tick attaches to a host to take a blood meal the tick's saliva can contain the bacteria responsible for causing Ehrlichiosis. There is a 1 to 3 week incubation period where the bacteria multiplies in the host. In the acute stage the dog can develop enlargement of the spleen, liver, and lymph nodes. Blood vessels can become inflamed and blood can have difficulties clotting. Blood clotting problems can occur in any of the stages of Ehrlichiosis.

In the subclinical stage of the disease the bacteria persists and results in decreased blood platelets. In the chronic stage of Ehrlichiosis the bacteria can cause problems with platelet production in the bone marrow itself further reducing blood clotting ability in the patient. Signs of Ehrlichiosis can range from spontaneous bleeding (nose bleeds, sneezing blood) to general lethargy, respiratory difficulty, difficulty walking, and eye pain.

Lyme disease is the tick born disease people are familiar with the most. However, dogs in Southern Illinois rarely test positive for Lyme disease. We probably don't get one positive Lyme disease patient a year and those positives we do get usually come from patients that have moved to Southern Illinois from Lyme disease prominent areas.

There is treatment for Ehrlichiosis and Lyme Disease. Once a patient has the bacteria it is usually present for the rest of their life though. Appropriate antibiotics can be given periodically to reduce the bacteria population. We have had many patients

over the years that tested positive for Ehrlichia and were given the antibiotic of choice. In many of these cases the clients tell us that the dog feels much better after a round of antibiotics. This is logical because once the bacterial population is decreased then the patient should feel better even if they aren't completely cleared of the bacteria.

Quality tick control is essential for dogs that have potential exposure to ticks. There are products that work very well at killing ticks. In the past it was thought by experts that ticks had to be attached for a day or two in order to transmit the bacteria for most tick borne diseases. More recent research has shown that ticks can transmit some bacteria in a matter of hours. So, it is imperative if you and your dog are outside in a tick infested area to search yourself and your dog for ticks at the end of the day.