

## Summer Insects and Diseases Which Can Harm Your Pets

Summer brings sunshine, fresh air and lots of opportunities for your pet to get out and enjoy the weather at your side. Unfortunately, summer fun for your pets also brings increased hazards to their health and safety. Before you take to the great outdoors with your furry (or unfurry) friends, be sure to make yourself aware of common pests, illnesses and hazards that become a danger in the warmer months.

### **Itchy, Scratchy and Owie! – Fleas and their Friends**

Biting insects are the most common summertime pet complaints, and the most familiar to people. Fleas, ticks and mosquitoes can cause problems for your pet, and pets are also vulnerable to harm from bees, wasps and ants. Here are some tips for prevention and treatment if your pet should run afoul of some evil insect.

#### **Fleas**

The most common pet parasites are fleas, and their most active season in the Northern Hemisphere is summer – or more specifically, April through August. Fleas can make your dog or cat thoroughly miserable, and extremely ill. These tiny parasites feed on your pet's blood and lay eggs in the animal's skin. This can lead to tapeworm. An allergic pet can become even more ill, developing scabs and sores, and losing their hair. Even worse, if the fleas manage to infest your carpets or your pet's sleeping area, it can be almost impossible to get rid of them.

Fortunately, it is far easier to prevent a flea infestation than it is to cure one. It just takes vigilance and routine. There are dozens of flea preventatives on the market, from flea collars to flea dips and baths. Most only need to be applied once a month and will be effective in keeping fleas off your dog or cat for up to thirty days.

**How to spot fleas:** The most common hint that your pet has picked up fleas is scratching. Flea bites are intensely itchy, and your pet will scratch and claw at the bitten area to get rid of the itch. You can also look for black specks in and around your pet's bedding area. Flea dirt looks like little black flecks, but if you rub it with a damp paper towel, you will see a red smear. You may also notice bald spots where your pet has bitten away the hair to get at the intense irritation.

**Complications from flea bites:** Fleas sometimes carry tapeworm eggs. Once inside your pet's body, tapeworms can cause malnutrition, vomiting, diarrhea and pure misery. They can eventually kill your pet. Other complications include hair loss, hot spots and weepy sores.

**How to Treat Fleas:** Prevention is the key, but if your pet does manage to pick up fleas, a veterinarian is your best resource. There are flea dips and baths that will kill fleas, as well as sprays that will get rid of their eggs and friends in bedding and around your home.

#### **Ticks**

The tick is another bloodsucker that likes to attach itself to animals. Ticks live in woody and field areas, and find their meals by sensing heat. When something warm-blood passes by, a tick will cling to clothing or hair and eventually find itself to a body area with little hair. Once there, it inserts its mouth parts into the skin and begins feeding. It will not let go until it has had a full meal. At that point, it withdraws its mouth parts, drops off the body and crawls off to lay its eggs.

As unpleasant as that sounds, the real danger with ticks is that they are notorious carriers of disease. While the majority of tick bites are not diseased, the chance is always there. In addition, tick bites are painful and itchy and can become infected.

**Treatment of Ticks:** The best treatment is prevention, of course. There are tick preventives on the market that do an excellent job of keeping ticks off your pets. In addition, you should make a practice of checking your pets from nose to tail-tip for ticks whenever they spend time outdoors.

**Tick Removal:** If a tick does manage to sink its teeth into your pet, it should be carefully removed with tweezers and the spot dabbed with rubbing alcohol.

#### **Mosquitoes**

Your pet needs mosquito repellent just as much as your kids do. Mosquitoes are more than irritants – they carry and spread disease, and they will bite your pet. The most serious disease carried by mosquitoes is actually a parasite – heartworms. Heartworms are transmitted by infected mosquitoes,

and they can be fatal.

**Preventing Mosquito Bites:** There are some steps you can take to reduce the chances of your pet being bitten by mosquitoes.

Keep pet indoors during prime mosquito hours (usually early evening)

Eliminate standing water around your home to avoid attracting egg-laying mosquitoes

Use area mosquito repellants like citronella candles and zappers

In addition, be certain that you treat your pet with heartworm preventative regularly. Speak with your veterinarian about the best heartworm preventatives, and other routines that can help keep your pet healthy and happy all summer long.

### About the Author

Brian Jenkins is a freelance writer who often writes about topics pertaining to the care of pets and health options for pets such as [Pet Meds](#)

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