

How to protect dogs against fleas, ticks, mosquitoes, lice

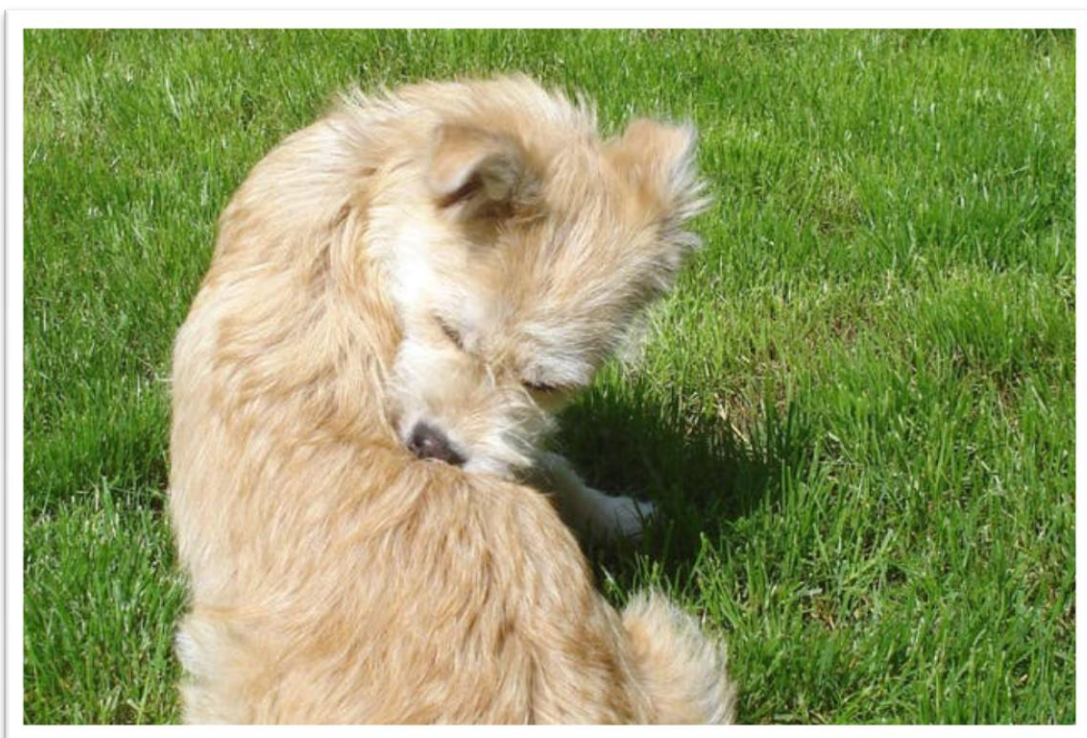


Dogs love to go on walks. Walks are probably their favorite part of the day. But if we don't take the necessary precautions, these beautiful moments can quickly turn into opportunities to get unwanted visitors. We are talking, of course, about external parasites (*bugs* and *insects*) from the flea that lives in the fur of your friendly neighborhood cat to the ticks that lay hidden in the grass, waiting for their next meal.

What do we need to know about these parasites?

Let's start with one of the most common unwanted guests, namely **the flea**. People who live in apartment complexes have a higher risk of encountering this parasite because there are several “parking spots” for fleas on the move. I’m talking about the stray animals on the block, looking for food and living out of the inhabitants’ kindness.

On a dog, you can only find the adult flea. The young flea lays in a cocoon from which it emerges when it perceives vibrations (such as those created by a human or an animal that happens to pass by). This “junior” flea must consume blood the first 12 hours after it emerges from its cocoon, otherwise, it dies. That is exactly why, this flea very aggressive and will attach to any living creature that comes its way.



A dog that becomes plagued by such a nuisance will display symptoms such as restlessness and excessive scratching. In order to detect fleas, the dog's fur must be checked, from the tail up, in the direction opposite to that in which the hair is growing. Another clear sign of flea parasitosis is the black “dots” that we can be found in both the dog's fur and its shelter. These "grains" are actually the flea's feces (digested blood, with which the larvae are fed). If the parasitosis is severe, the dog can develop allergic dermatitis which is characterized by **redness**, the appearance of a **rash**, and **hair loss**. To treat dermatitis, a visit to the vet is highly recommended.

Ticks are also quite common, especially when temperatures start to rise. In their case, they can be found on the dog in any of their life stages, from the nymph phase to the adult one. You can even find different evolutionary stages of ticks on the same dog, living in harmony. The blood “grip” (the period in which they are latched on to feed) lasts about 3-4 days, after which the female is ready to lay eggs. The male ticks shouldn't be overlooked either because it hops from dog to dog (feeding sparsely) in search of females, spreading diseases. There are multiple varieties of ticks, each carrying specific diseases. Some of the most severe illnesses transmitted by ticks include Lyme disease and babesiosis.

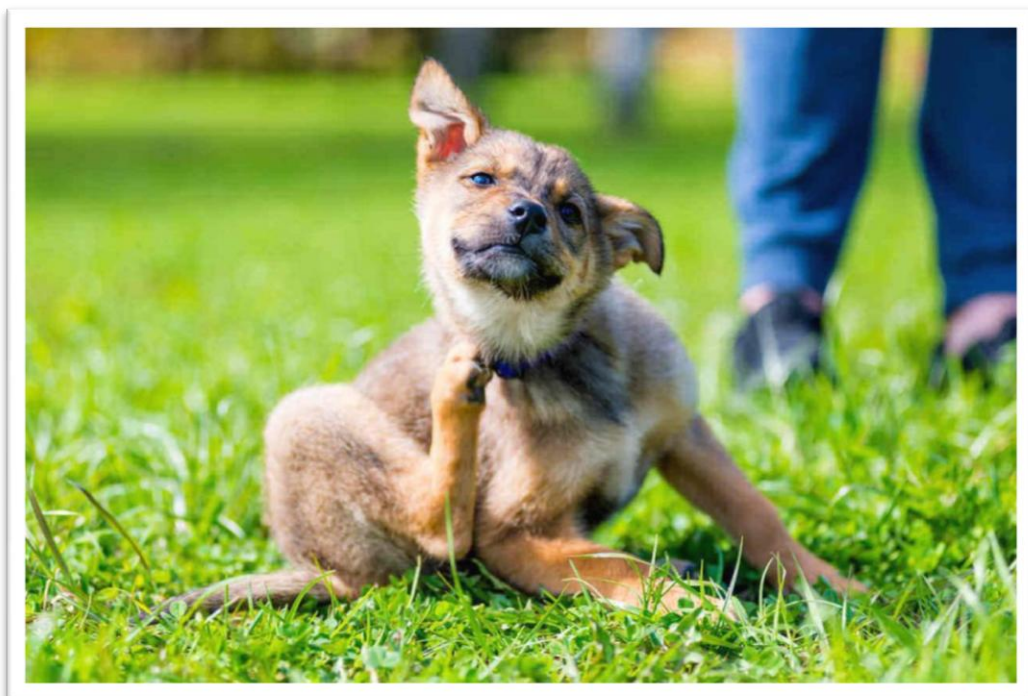


Lyme disease (also known as the disease with 1000 faces) is difficult to diagnose and is unfortunately transmissible to humans. A common symptom is a very high fever. For this disease, the best treatment is prevention, which is done by administering Doxycycline if such a tick is found on the dog (or if you are the victim of this tiny beast). Doxycycline also prevents other tick-borne diseases such as anaplasmosis, leishmaniasis, and ehrlichiosis.

Babesiosis affects red blood cells and is a serious disease. Symptoms include: apathy, fever, reddish or blackish urine. It can affect vital organs such as the kidneys and liver, making it **lethal**. Babesiosis is not transmissible to humans and cannot be prevented by taking Doxycycline.

Ticks are easily discovered by touch, and the most common places where they can be found are in areas with fine skin such as: on the inside of the ear, the skin around the eyes, and between the toes or toe beans. If you find a tick on your dog, don't panic and don't start pulling on it, because even if you manage to remove it, the head will remain stuck in the dog's skin. The correct way to remove a tick is as follows: soak a piece of medical cotton in alcohol and hold it against the tick for 3-4 minutes. Then, with a pair of regular tweezers, grasp it and carefully pull it out. The bite site should be disinfected and the dog should get a preventive treatment with Doxycycline. Or, you can snap a pic of the tick and show it to your vet, asking about the preventive measures you can take to help your dog. **Regardless of the prevention method chosen, keep an eye on your dog for a few days, looking for any potential symptoms of babesiosis or other tick-borne diseases.**

Rush to the vet if you notice anything out of the ordinary.



Lice are not as common as other parasites. There are two kinds of lice, the red ones (hematophagous) that feed on blood and the white ones (malophagus), which "eat" dead skin. Most parasitoses are caused by white lice. Due to their coloration, they are harder to notice, but they can be found at the base of the dog's hairs. A dog with lice has severe itching and crusts on the surface of the skin. They are quite easy to get rid of by using an antiparasitic shampoo. Other methods include the use of special powders or sprays.

Another parasite that we must keep in mind is the **mosquito** because it can carry larvae of *Dirofilaria imitris* (also known as heartworm). This larva needs 7-8 months to become an adult and it can also replicate, thus the disease has a slow evolution. The signs of parasitosis pop up around 3-4 years after the initial infection (but it also depends on the number of worms, it can appear faster if the parasitosis is more severe). These worms are dangerous because they pile up in the heart or pulmonary arteries regions and can cause death.

The common symptoms are: coughing, a runny nose, and a tendency to get tired faster. The disease can be detected immediately with special tests and blood work. However, the treatment is very harsh and without guaranteed results. This is why prevention, by protecting your dog against mosquitoes during the months when the insects are active, is highly recommended.

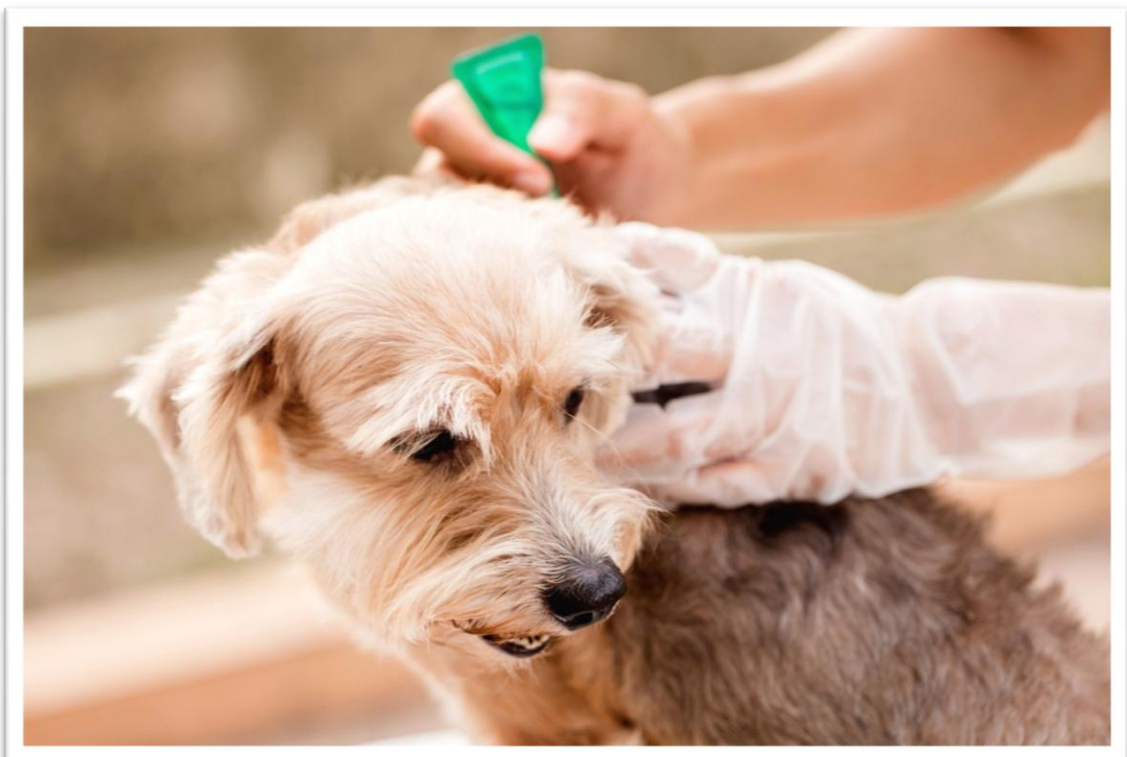


How can we protect our pets?

The solutions are abundant, allowing the owners to choose the most convenient option.

Solutions are usually **administered on the back of the dog's neck**, provided that the dog's last bath was at least 48 hours before treatment. For proper administration, a path is made starting from behind the ears, and the drops are applied directly to the skin following the path until the small recipient runs out. The dog shouldn't be petted in that area for about two days. This treatment should be repeated every 4 weeks (this period depends on the product, so read its specifications carefully or seek the advice of a veterinarian) and it's recommended for pups that are not bathed very often because washing also cleans the product from the skin.

Protective collars are impregnated with a special powder that they release slowly. With the help of the natural movement of the hair from front to back, this dust is distributed throughout the body. This process takes 3-4 days during which the pet is not protected. The collar should be as close to the skin as possible, without strangling the dog (keep enough space in between the skin and the collar for your finger to fit in). It offers protection for a period of 5 months (again, depending on the product) and, as with solutions, it's recommended to bath the dog less often. And, keep in mind that after each bath the collar needs 3-4 days to "work."



Pills work from the inside, the product being released directly into the bloodstream. Their disadvantage is that in order for the parasite to be repelled, it must first bite the pet. Due to this, contact diseases such as babesiosis and Lyme can occur. The advantage is that it does not affect the dog's bathing schedule. Pills protect the dog for 5 weeks (or more depending on the type of product).



Each delousing product has the parasites they work against clearly stated on the packaging. If you are not sure which is the right option for your pet, consult a veterinarian. A good piece of advice can provide complete protection against all external hazards. To have a healthy and happy pet, delousing is a step that cannot be skipped. A mistake that some owners make is that they provide protection for the dog only in the warm seasons. Fleas, however, are active all year round and even some ticks are active in colder seasons (as a result of climate change).

Delousing must therefore be carried out throughout the year, regardless of whether the pet had access to the outdoors or not (we can very easily become "taxis" for hungry parasites). Prevention is always better than treatment, and on top of that, who would want unwanted guests?

Disclaimer

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