

Tick-Borne Diseases in Dunstable
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The only really good thing about this long winter has been the decrease in ticks. The bad news is that as soon as the snow melts the ticks will be back and with the ticks comes tick-borne diseases. The species most affected by tick-borne diseases are humans and dogs. Cats seem to be able to clear the organisms without causing disease.

In this area we see mostly dog and deer ticks. While the dog tick can carry diseases like Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Ehrlichiosis, we don't see those diseases very often. However the diseases carried by the deer tick are fairly common around Dunstable. These include Lyme Disease and Anaplasmosis.

At the Dunstable Animal Clinic we run a heartworm test via a blood sample on dogs every year which also checks them for exposure to three tick-borne diseases: Lyme Disease, Anaplasmosis, and Ehrlichiosis. In 2007 we had 18.3% dogs show positive exposure to Lyme Disease and 11% show positive exposure to Anaplasmosis. We had no dogs that showed exposure to Ehrlichiosis. It is important to know that the test only tests for exposure, so a positive result only means that the dog was bitten by a deer tick that was carrying the disease. In order to diagnose the disease in a dog, the dog must be showing clinical signs as well as have a positive blood test. Most of the positive dogs were not showing clinical signs. After a dog becomes exposed to a tick-borne disease there are three main things that can happen: 1. The dog can become clinically ill (swollen hot painful joints, not eating, limping, being very lethargic and with Anaplasmosis the dog can also have unexplained or uncontrollable bleeding. 2. The dog can clear the organism on his or her own with no treatment. These dogs will have a negative test if they are not re-exposed. 3. The dog may carry the organism for a long time and the dog may or may not ever have clinical signs. There is no way of knowing which way an individual dog will react to exposure.

There is currently a lot of research being done on tick-borne diseases and there are many different ways to handle a positive exposure. Currently at the Dunstable Animal Clinic we are advising all dogs exposed to ticks have a Lyme vaccine every year (there is no vaccine available for Anaplasmosis). We also highly recommend tick control whenever there is no snow on the ground, with either a monthly preventative (Advantix or Frontline plus), or with a Preventic collar which lasts 3 months. For any dog that shows up with a positive exposure on the heartworm test we also advise a course of the antibiotic Doxycycline unless your dog is allergic to it.

So as we all prepare to be Thankful for warmer weather, lets all prepare for the ticks to return to Dunstable.