How is Lyme disease spread?

Deer ticks, which are prevalent in various parts of the United States, are the major carrier of Lyme disease. But some other species of ticks can also carry the disease. Deer ticks are tiny parasites that are difficult to see with the naked eye and can easily hide on people and pets.

For the bacteria to spread to the victim, ticks must remain attached for 36-48 hours, which is why it’s so important to detect them early. If you check your pet daily you can significantly decrease risk of disease. It is unlikely that your pet will spread ticks to you.

Other ticks can also carry the bacteria, and ticks themselves are spread by many different animals, including birds that may transport them long distances. Ticks also spread such diseases as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Ehrlichiosis, a disease that affects the blood cells.

What to look for

If you find a tick on your pet, mark it down on your calendar and watch for these signs of Lyme disease over the next several weeks:

- **Fever** – Your pet’s abdomen may feel overly warm to the touch.
- **Depression** – Your pet may be lethargic.
- **Lack of appetite**
- **Lameness** – This sign is one of the most common; your pet may be limping or have swollen and painful joints.

If you see any of these signs, bring your pet in for an appointment immediately.

Preventive care

To reduce your pet’s chances of contracting Lyme disease, take these precautions:

- **Vaccinate your pet.** A safe, effective vaccine booster is covered in all Banfield Optimum Wellness Plans®. Your Banfield veterinarian will determine your pet’s need for the vaccine based on the prevalence of Lyme disease in your area.
- **Use a veterinary-approved flea and tick repellant monthly.**
- **Avoid tall grassy areas whenever possible, especially wooded areas inhabited by deer or field mice.**
- **Keep weeds under control to limit the spread of rodents, ticks and other parasites.**
- **When outdoors, protect your pet with an insecticide that’s effective against ticks.** Your pet’s doctor can recommend an appropriate product and help you select from a wide variety of sprays, solutions and protective collars.
- **When you return from an outing, carefully check every inch of your pet’s skin and coat for ticks, including the groin, around the ears and tail and between the toes. Removing any ticks within 24 hours greatly decreases the chance of infection. A systematic tick check is the best preventive step you can take after vaccination.**

If you find a tick, remove it immediately. Try using an alcohol swab, which may irritate the tick and cause it to loosen its grasp. Using tweezers, carefully pull the tick upward where its mouthparts contact the skin. Try not to squeeze the tick while removing it as this may enhance transmission of the bacteria. Occasionally, a small tag of your pet’s outer skin will pull away with the tick.

If you have any doubts about tick removal, bring your pet to Banfield for help. We can also help you determine if testing or antibiotic treatment is needed.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.
Veterinary care

Veterinarians usually rule out other diseases first by performing, for example, a complete blood count (CBC); blood and urine profiles to check organ function; X-rays; or tests on fluid samples from swollen joints. Other tests can be used to detect specific proteins, like antibodies, in the blood.

If possible, save the tick in a jar and bring it to your Banfield veterinarian immediately. Identifying the type of tick may help doctors diagnose the problem. If your pet exhibits signs of Lyme disease, it’s comforting to know that these tests are included or discounted in Banfield Optimum Wellness Plans.

Several antibiotics are effective against Lyme disease, but individual responses differ. For example, some pets and people have relapses despite antibiotic treatment. Occasionally, hospitalization, fluid therapy and arthritis or fever medications may be necessary. The best ways to control symptoms are with early diagnosis and treatment.