

## **What You Need to Know: Heartworms, Fleas, and Ticks.**

As the weather warms up and the days get longer, you might spend more time outside with your pets. Increased outdoor time is great for both you and your pet, but it can also increase the risk of heartworms, fleas and ticks in your pet. These pests can not only spread disease and infection to your pets but can also affect humans. Keeping these critters out of your home and off your pet is very important!

This month your veterinary team wants to provide you with information on heartworms, fleas and ticks, as well as what signs and symptoms to watch out for and how to treat and prevent them.

### **Heartworms:**

#### *What are Heartworms?*

Heartworms are parasites that invade animals' bodies and live in their hearts, lungs, and other areas. These worms can grow up to a foot long inside your pet's body. When left untreated, heartworms may cause severe lung disease, heart failure, and damage to various other organs and systems in the body.

#### *How do Pets Get Heartworms?*

Mosquitos are common carriers of heartworms, spreading the larvae from infected animals to unprotected pets through their bites. If your pet is not taking preventatives, they are at high risk of getting heartworms, especially as the weather heats up and mosquito populations increase. Heartworms can impact both dogs and cats, but it manifests as different symptoms in each species.

#### *Signs in Dogs:*

Dogs suffering from early-stage heartworms will show little or no symptoms. The longer heartworm disease is left untreated, the more likely symptoms will develop. If your pet exhibits any of these signs, please book a veterinary appointment to have your dog checked out.

- Mild persistent cough
- Reluctance to exercise
- Fatigue after moderate activity
- Decreased appetite.
- Weight loss
- Heart failure
- The appearance of a swollen belly due to excess fluid in the abdomen

#### *Signs in Cats:*

Heartworms in cats produce symptoms that are either very subtle or very aggressive. Cats with heartworm disease may suffer from the following:

- Coughing
- Asthma-like attacks
- Periodic vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Weight loss

In worst-case scenarios, Heartworms can result in sudden death in cats. If you notice any of these signs in your cat, call us and make an appointment so we can get your cat the treatment they need.

## **Fleas:**

### *What are Fleas?*

Fleas are wingless insects that can jump up to 2 feet high. These pests can live for as short as 13 days or as long as one year, and during their lifespan, fleas can produce millions of offspring. The Cat Flea is the most common type of flea in North America, but don't let the name fool you; this flea affects dogs and cats alike.

Veterinarians estimate that for every flea you see on your pet, there are another hundred in your home. Giving your pet monthly preventatives is the best way to keep fleas out of your home.

### *Symptoms of Fleas in Dogs:*

- Droppings in fur (look like small dark grains of sand)
- Flea eggs (tiny, white grains)
- Excessive scratching, licking or biting at the skin
- Hair loss
- Scabs and hot spots
- Pale gums
- Tapeworms

### *Symptoms of Fleas on Cats:*

- Droppings in fur (look like small dark grains of sand)
- Flea eggs (tiny, white grains)
- Itchy, irritated skin
- Persistent scratching
- Chewing and licking
- Hair loss
- Tapeworms
- Pale lips and gums

### *How are Fleas Getting Inside?*

Fleas are brought into homes by landing on pets when they go outside. Fleas typically prefer humid climates, but it is still essential to give them preventatives year-round. While fleas need a living host, their eggs will fall off the pet and onto furniture, carpet, rugs, and bedding. From there, the fleas will hatch and find a living host; the new host could be an animal or human.

### *How Do I Treat My Pet for Fleas?*

The best place to start is by giving your pet preventatives monthly! Preventatives can be over-the-counter, prescription, and in oral or topical forms. Topical treatments typically consist of shampoos, sprays, and powders, while oral generally takes one pill a month. You can also use a flea comb to check for fleas, and wash your pets' bedding and blankets frequently.

Fleas like to reside in dark, moist areas like leaf piles and yard clippings. Make sure to dispose of any organic material that may build up in your yard.

It is also essential to give preventatives to all pets, even if they stay indoors because fleas can attach to other pets and infect your pet within the home.

## **Ticks**

### *What are Ticks?*

Like spiders and mites, ticks are arachnids. These pests find a living host, bury their heads into the skin of the unlucky person or pet, and feed off of their host's blood.

While ticks are the most active in the warmer months, protecting your pet from them year-round is still important. Ticks live in tall grasses, so always check for ticks after your pet spends time outside. Giving your indoor pet preventatives is also important because outdoor pets can transfer the ticks they bring inside.

### *How to Tell if Your Pet Has a Tick:*

Most ticks are visible to the naked eye but aren't typically noticeable until they feed on their host's blood and swell up. If your pet spends a lot of time outside, especially in places where ticks are prevalent, it is important to check for ticks often. Ticks typically don't cause obvious discomfort but can be dangerous, causing anemia and spreading diseases such as Lyme disease.

You can check for ticks by carefully running your hands over your pet, focusing on the head, feet, and inside and around the ears. It is important to do this after your pet has been outside for a long time, especially if they have been running through tall grass or in an area where ticks are common.

### *How do I Treat My Pet for Ticks?*

While you can remove ticks at home, it should be done carefully. Infection can be transmitted through contact with tick blood to pets and humans.

Make sure to use gloves and tweezers to remove the tick from your pet. Ask someone to help hold your pet still and have treats on hand for after! Grab the tick as close to the body as possible and pull it directly upward. Jerking or twisting the tick may cause the head to separate from the body. Leaving the head in your pet's skin can lead to an infection. Once the tick is out, drop the tick into alcohol in a jar with a screw-on lid. Flushing the tick or throwing it away will not kill it. Wash your hands with soap and water and disinfect the tweezers with alcohol. Monitor your pet over the next few weeks for any signs of infection, and if you have any concerns, make an appointment with us!

Call us with any additional questions about Heartworm, Flea, and Tick prevention! Regular testing and monthly preventatives are the best way to prevent disease and infection. If your pet needs testing or preventatives, book an appointment with us today!