

Fleas, Ticks and Other Parasites

Parasites on Your Dog

Parasites are organisms that live in or on your dog, causing harm. Minimizing parasites is an important part of keeping your pet healthy. Some pet parasites can cause problems for people too, so keeping them out of your home is also good for you and your family.

External parasites are insects or arachnids that live on the skin or in the ears, feeding on blood or cell fluids. Most are large enough to be visible, but its easy to miss them on a furry pet. Your veterinarian can tell you about parasite control products that are safe, convenient, and effective.

Fleas

Fleas are about twice the size of the head of a pin and are brown in color. They scurry rapidly through your dogs hair coat and can jump several feet. Fleas can be detected by combing your pet with a fine-toothed flea comb. The presence of flea droppings is another sign. Flea droppings look like black sand. A good trick for differentiating flea droppings from dirt is to add a drop or two of water. Flea droppings contain partially digested blood, and will produce a red color when wet.

Fleas cause severe skin irritation and allergies. Your dog may scratch so much that he creates raw spots, which can become infected. Severe infestations can cause anemia. Fleas are also the carriers of tapeworms. Although fleas prefer furry creatures, they can cause itchy bites on people.

There are many products available for flea control. The newest, safest, and most effective are available from your veterinarian. These products are also very convenient, requiring only a few drops of liquid applied once a month. You may still notice a few fleas occasionally. Sprays for the home and garden can minimize this problem. Make sure to read and follow label directions on all flea products. Some products can be dangerous to you or your dog if they are used improperly.

Lice

Lice are whitish insects that are smaller than fleas. Their eggs, or nits, can be detected on the hair shafts. In dogs, lice are much less common than fleas. Lice can cause skin irritation and anemia. Insecticidal shampoos and other products can be used to treat lice, but it is very important to treat the bedding as well. Although people get lice, they are a different type, so you dont have to worry about getting lice from your pet.

Ticks

Ticks are arachnids, relatives of spiders. Their size varies tremendously, depending on the type, age, sex, and whether the tick has fed on blood. Larval ticks may be smaller than the head of a pin, whereas some adult ticks are larger than a corn kernel. Ticks are detected by careful examination of your pets skin and ears.

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Ticks can cause anemia and are carriers of many serious diseases, including Lyme disease and Ehrlichia. They can also bite people.

Some of the topical flea products available from your veterinarian for flea control are also effective for ticks. In addition, powerful tick-specific products may be recommended.

Mites

Mites, like ticks, are arachnids, but they are much smaller. Mites are difficult or impossible to see without magnification. Ear mites can be detected by your veterinarian during a physical examination. Skin mites usually require a skin scraping test. Symptoms vary depending on the type of mite, but can include itching, irritation, and hair loss. Skin mites are the cause of mange. Effective mite treatments are available by prescription. The treatment often takes several weeks.

