

Summertime is finally here in Lake Country, and people all across the area are looking forward to enjoying days spent camping, fishing, picnicking, or just lounging poolside soaking up the Georgia sun. Oftentimes, our beloved, four legged companions can be found trotting alongside taking in what the great outdoors has to offer. Unfortunately, this includes unwanted warm weather dangers such as ticks.



Should I be worried about ticks?

In short, “yes.” Georgia is home to five tick species (Lone Star Tick, American Dog Tick, Brown Dog Tick, Gulf Coast Tick, and the Deer Tick) that thrive in the wet, warm spring and summer months, and can often be found in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas. It is important to note that even though ticks are more active in the warmer months the CDC warns that tick bites and disease transmission occur year round in Georgia.

What Diseases do they carry?

Lone Star Tick: These small brown/tan colored ticks have a distinctive white spot on the middle of their backs (females). Lone Star ticks will usually select cats, dogs, and humans as hosts. This species of tick can carry diseases such as ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and tularemia.

American Dog Tick: This species of tick prefers to feed from dogs and humans. They are brown in color with white specks on the back. When fully engorged, they turn grayish and resemble a small bean or grape. Diseases transmitted to pets by the American dog tick include Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia.

Brown Dog Tick: This species of tick rarely bites humans and prefers dogs as its host. One trait that sets this species apart from other ticks is its ability to survive indoors and complete its lifecycle there. While other ticks can be carried inside by humans and pets alike, they are unable to establish themselves and cause a household infestation. This tick is known to carry organisms responsible for ehrlichiosis and a form of anaplasmosis in dogs and cats.

Gulf Coast Tick: This species is known to cause tick paralysis and is associated with *Amblyomma maculatum* pathogens in dogs. These ticks appear more elaborate in appearance with multiple black stripes present on the male back plate and a single black stripe present in females.

Deer Tick: Also known as the “blacklegged tick”, the deer tick will feed on several different hosts including dogs, cats, and humans. They are very small, reddish brown in color, and turn a darker brown after feeding. This species can transmit diseases such as ehrlichiosis, babesiosis, and Lyme disease.

It is important to note that ticks are not just a concern for dogs. One major tick threat for cats is an infection called Cytauxzoonosis, transmitted by the Lone Star and American Dog Tick. Unlike many tick-borne illnesses which can be clinically treated, even with treatment cytauxzoonosis is often fatal and can kill cats within one week of symptoms presenting. We encourage our readers to take advantage of articles written by the ASPCA and other reputable sources to educate themselves on the symptoms that may present with each of the above illnesses.

How can I prevent ticks?

You may believe that because your cat or dog is an “indoor pet” they are not susceptible to these dangerous blood-suckers. However, ticks can infest even pets that only spend brief periods of time outside. Given this the best method of tick prevention is to apply an over the counter spot-on medication that can be purchased from your veterinarian, pet store, or online. These medications are effective at keeping parasites at bay for up to a month. We suggest setting a reoccurring reminder on your cellphone’s calendar to keep your pet up to date and safe. Wearing insect repellent containing deet or permethrin is advised for pet owners. Additional measures include avoiding areas with tall grass and heavily bushed areas as well as wearing long sleeves and pants when hiking.

It is very important to do a full body tick check after possible exposures as most disease transmissions do not happen immediately, but occur 4-12 hours after the first bite.



I found a tick on my pet, now what?

1. Part your pet’s hair around the tick with your fingers.
2. Place the pointed tweezers around the tick’s head, as close to the skin as possible.
3. Pull gently upwards with steady hands, adding pressure until the tick lets you pull it away from the skin. Do not twist, yank, or crush the tick. If any parts of the tick are left behind, consult your vet.
4. Clean the bite areas and your hands with rubbing alcohol if available, or use soap and water.
5. Dispose of the tick by killing it in alcohol or flushing it down the toilet.
6. If you are concerned your pet may have contracted tick disease, save the tick in alcohol for testing.

***To protect your pets and avoid unwanted illness this summer it is best to be cautious, educated, and to take all necessary preventative measures.**

When possible take a photo of the tick that can be shared with your vet if needed in the situation that further complications from the tick bite arise.