Preventing Ticks

Overview

- Ticks are parasites that feed on animal and human blood, and can transmit diseases such as Lyme disease.
- They prefer mild weather so are most common in the warmer months.
- Ticks are most likely to be found in long grass, woodlands, and areas with lots of wildlife.
- If you find a tick on your pet, it's important to remove it quickly, to prevent transmission of disease, and properly, so none of it is left behind.
- Fortunately, there are many different products available to repel and kill ticks.

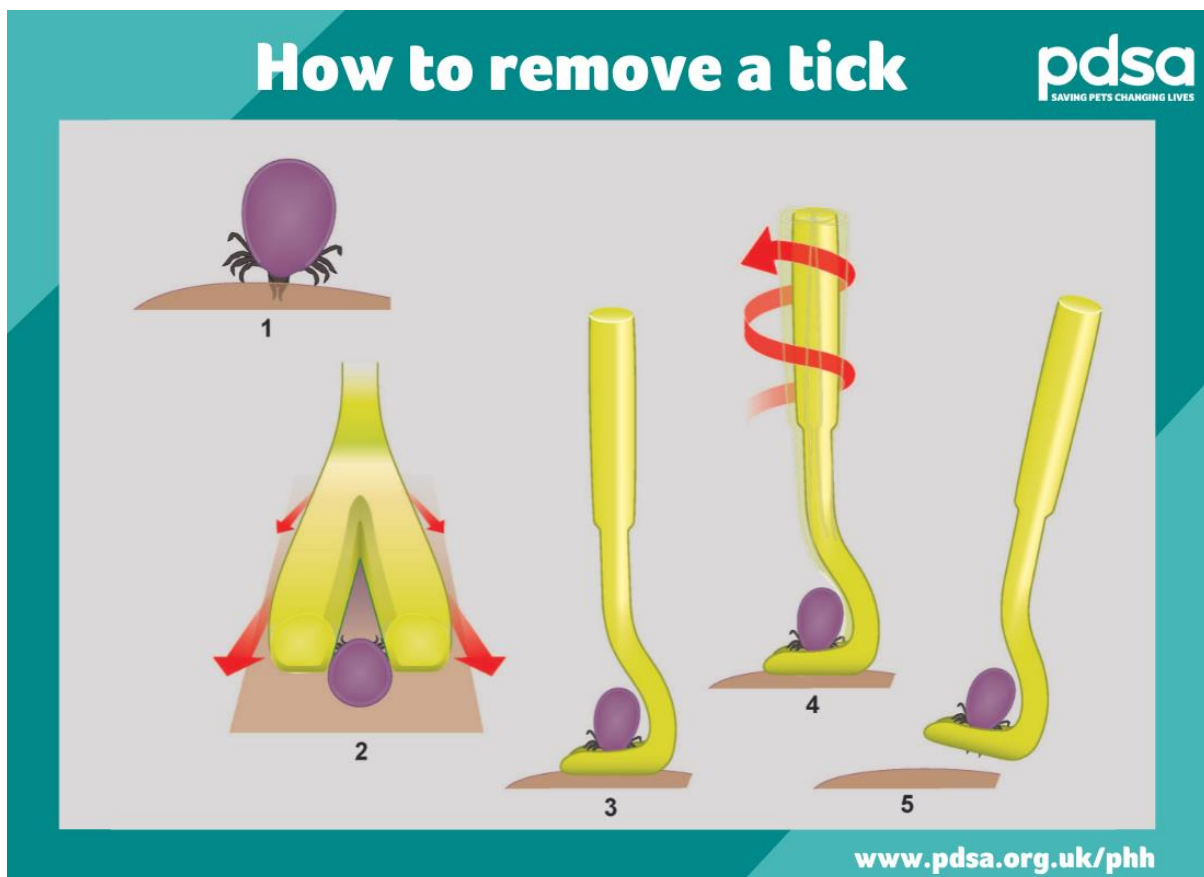## What does a tick look like?

Ticks are round and shiny, with a very small head and a large, slightly flattened body. They tend to be brown, pink, purple or a bluish grey. When a tick first attaches to your pet it's likely to be approximately the size of a pinhead, but as it feeds it will grow to the size of a small pea. At first you might mistake a tick for a skin tag or a lump, but if you look closely you will see its eight legs close to where it attaches to your pet. Ticks are tricky to spot until they get quite big, which is why it's important to check your pet regularly, especially after walks in long grass.

How do pets get ticks?

Ticks don't jump or fly, they simply crawl on to their host when they come into contact with them (i.e. if a dog were to walk past a tick on a blade of grass, it might grab onto the dogs fur). They tend to live in woodlands, moorlands, in places with long grass, and can live on many different species so are common in areas with lots of wildlife and farm animals. Ticks are most common when the weather is warm (between spring and autumn).

How to remove a tick

If you find a tick on your pet it's best to remove it quickly to reduce the risk of it transmitting disease. However, it's equally as important to remove it properly so none of it gets left behind. **Never remove a tick by pulling, crushing or squeezing it** – this will increase the chance of transmitting a disease, and can result in the ticks head, or mouth parts being left behind.

1. Slide a tick-twisting tool* under the tick, as close to your pet's skin as possible.

2. Make sure the tick is held firmly inside the hook. Use a smaller hook if it feels loose.

3. Twist the tool two to three times in one direction until you feel the tick loosen from your pet. **Do not pull it** – the tick will let go when you've twisted enough.

4. Slowly lift the tool away when you feel the tick loosen, it should stay in the hook.

5. Get rid of the tick to ensure it can't affect any other people or animals.

6. After removing the tick from your pet, clean where it was attached, and monitor them for any signs of illness. If you're unsure about removing the tick yourself, contact your vet for help.

* You can use normal tweezers but be very careful to hold the tick as close to the skin as possible

How can I stop my pet getting ticks?

There's no way to completely stop your pet from getting ticks, but there's a lot you can do to reduce the risk:

Avoid places known for ticks

- Find out if ticks are common in your area.
- Avoid long grass and stick to paths or open spaces.
- If you're going to a new place or taking your pet on holiday, check how common ticks are in that area.

Check

- Regularly check your pet for ticks after walks – they are most common on the head, ears, armpits, groin and tummy.

Tick treatments and preventatives

- There are several products, such as collars, tablets, and spot-on treatments, that are highly effective at killing ticks, and very importantly, they tend to work before the tick has been attached long enough to spread disease.
- It's especially important to make sure your pet is protected throughout the warmer months, particularly if you live in a high risk area.
- Many of tick treatments also provide protection against other parasites such as fleas – speak to your vet to find the right treatment for your pet.

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When to contact your vet

There is no need to contact your vet if you have successfully removed a tick from your pet and are confident that none was left behind. However, if you notice any redness, swelling or any signs of infection around the site, it's best to contact your vet for advice. It's also important to contact your vet for advice if your dog seems unwell after having a tick.

Find out whether you are eligible for free or low cost PDSA veterinary treatment by visiting www.pdsa.org.uk/eligibility

Lyme disease

Some ticks in the UK carry Lyme disease (Borreliosis). Common signs of Lyme disease include:

- Limping, stiffness and swollen joints that shifts between legs
- Fever (high temperature)
- Low energy (lethargy)
- Swollen lymph nodes (glands) around the body
- Pets don't tend to get the classic 'bulls eye/target' lesion that humans get if bitten by a tick with Lyme disease

If you're worried your pet may have Lyme Disease, book an appointment with your vet.

Ticks can also carry other nasty diseases that didn't used to be present in the UK, but are emerging because of the increasing numbers of pets travelling or being imported from other countries. Always speak to your vet if you think your pet has become unwell after having a tick.

Can humans get ticks?

Yes – ticks can't survive for long on humans, but they can still attach and feed from us. As well as causing irritation and infection, ticks can transmit diseases such as Lyme Disease (Borreliosis) to humans. Although Lyme disease is rare, if you find a tick on yourself and you have concerns, it is best to contact your local health care services or the NHS for advice.

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