

Lyme disease in dogs

Overview

- Lyme disease is an illness spread by ticks.
- It's caused by a bacteria that is spread when a tick attaches to your pet.
- Lyme disease causes a variety of vague symptoms such as limping, stiffness, fever and lethargy (low energy).
- Tick control is the best way to prevent Lyme disease.

What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease (also known as Borreliosis) is an illness spread by infected ticks. It can affect dogs, [people](#), horses and very occasionally, cats. Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria (Borrelia) that attacks tissues around the body, most commonly the joints, but also organs such as the kidneys. Lyme disease spreads when an infected tick attaches and feeds, so keeping your pet up to date with a product that kills or repels ticks is the best way to prevent it.

Read our article 'Ticks on pets' to find out more about ticks.



Oscar the dog picked up a tick from long grass. After it was removed, his owner monitored him for symptoms of Lyme disease but fortunately, he was fine.

Symptoms

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
- [Vomiting](#)
- [Diarrhoea](#)
- [Drinking and weeing more](#)

Each dog with Lyme disease will have slightly different symptoms depending on which parts of the body it attacks. Most commonly, it affects the joints but it can also affect other organs such as the kidneys. In some dogs, symptoms come and go.

A rash? In people, Lyme disease can cause a 'bullseye' rash, but this is not seen in dogs.

When to contact your vet

If your pet is showing any of the signs of Lyme disease, book an appointment with your vet ASAP, especially if you have found a tick on them recently. You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned, it's always best to contact your vet.

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

Treatment

Treatment for your dog will depend on the signs they are showing. Mild cases can often be successfully treated with [antibiotics](#), but severe cases often require treatment such as pain relief and a drip (fluids given into the blood stream). Treating Lyme disease can take

several weeks and sadly, for the worst affected dogs, treatment isn't always successful.

Outlook

Outlook for Lyme disease is good as long as symptoms aren't too severe and treatment is given quickly. Unfortunately, outlook is much worse for dogs with severe symptoms, or complications such as kidney failure. If your dog is in a lot of discomfort, it might be kinder to put them to sleep.

Preventing Lyme disease

The best way to prevent Lyme disease is to prevent ticks. You can prevent ticks by:

- Using tick collars, tablets or spot-on products.
- Avoiding long grass, especially in the warmer months.
- Avoiding places known for ticks (find out if [ticks are common in your area](#)).
- Regularly checking your pet for ticks after walks, they are most common on the head, ears, armpits and belly.

Find out more about ticks and how to prevent them.

Can humans get Lyme Disease?

Ticks can transmit Lyme disease (Borreliosis) to people, although this is rare. If you find a tick on yourself or someone else and you have concerns, it is best to contact your doctor, or the [NHS for advice](#).

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