



MARLTON ANIMAL HOSPITAL, P.A.

“WE CARE”

PAUL LUKIANOVICH, VMD

9 W. MAIN STREET
MARLTON, NJ 08053
(856) 983-5350
Fax: (856) 983-3655

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is a multi-organ disorder transmitted by ticks, caused by a spirochete called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The most well known transmitter or vector of Lyme disease is the deer tick, a tiny parasite about the size of the head of a pin, although any species of tick can spread the disease. While a local rash may occur in humans after a tick bite transmits the infection, this is seldom seen in pet animals. There is a possibility that other vectors exist for transmission of this disease, such as fleas or mosquitoes, but there is currently no evidence to support this theory.

Lyme disease has both acute and chronic phases. In the acute phase, the patient may develop a fever, lack of appetite, enlarged lymph nodes, and lameness or joint pain. The lameness may be intermittent or appear to shift from one leg to another. In the chronic phase, the most frequently noted symptom is recurring pain from arthritis, but organ disease such as kidney failure or cardiac arrhythmias can occur.

Lyme disease is diagnosed based on a history of clinical signs, a physical exam with compatible findings and a positive blood test result. Lyme disease tests are based on detecting antibodies against the organism, and as in human medicine, the tests are not always infallible. In some cases more than one test must be run to confirm the diagnosis, and in others, treatment may be instituted even without a confirmed diagnosis.

Treatment of this disease consists of a regimen of oral antibiotics for up to a month or even longer. If caught in the early stages, the disease may be completely arrested, with no chronic aftereffects persisting. Treatment of an animal for Lyme disease does not, however, prevent an animal from being re-infected in the future.

The best method for preventing this disease is to control the ticks by means of insecticides (Preventic® collars or Frontline Plus®) and the prompt removal of ticks from your pet, as well as vaccinating specifically for this disease. The vaccine is administered subcutaneously (under the skin) in two doses two weeks apart, followed by once yearly boosters. Examining your dog on a daily basis for ticks is essential even in vaccinated animals, as no vaccine can ever be 100% effective in all cases – vaccines just significantly decrease the risk of infection.

There is no data to suggest that infected pets place their owners at greater risk of acquiring this disease. Ticks should, however, be removed with tweezers, not fingers, and the bite area should be disinfected with iodine or alcohol. The head of the tick does NOT remain at the site of attachment. An inflammatory reaction may be noted with ANY tick bite, but will subside without any treatment in most cases.