

Tick Prevention and Tickborne Disease Testing

Is my dog at risk?

Any dog who spends time outside in areas where there are ticks could be at risk of diseases spread by ticks. Dogs who travel outside of Toronto, spend time in warmer countries, or spend a lot of time outdoors may be at increased risk. Historically there have been low levels of diseases spread by ticks within the city of Toronto. However, with warmer weather lasting longer and dogs traveling more, diseases spread by ticks are increasing in Canada.

How can diseases spread by ticks be prevented?

The best way to protect your dog from diseases spread by ticks is by using a tick prevention medication from April to November. If your pet's lifestyle puts them at higher risk for ticks (for example, travel to warm countries, or frequent hiking) prevention may be needed year-round. Tick prevention is usually a pill or a topical solution that is used once monthly throughout tick season. Many of these products also prevent against other parasites such as fleas, heartworm disease, or intestinal worms.

What is a 4DX test?

A 4DX test is a quick blood test that can be done during an appointment to check for heartworm disease and exposure to three diseases spread by ticks - Lyme, Anaplasma, and Ehrlichia. This is the test that is used at Toronto Humane Society Public Veterinary Services for annual heartworm testing.

How often is 4DX testing needed?

Testing for heartworm disease annually is recommended. Since the 4DX is a combination test, this also means we check for diseases spread by ticks annually. If your dog has symptoms of a disease spread by ticks or has recently been exposed to many ticks, you may choose to test more often than annually.

When is the best time to run a 4DX test?

Testing for tick-borne disease can be done at any time during the year. It is often done in combination with your dog's annual heartworm test.

I just found a tick on my dog – should I come in for the blood test tomorrow?

No. The blood test generally will not be positive until at least 2 months after a dog has been bitten by a tick. The best thing to do if your dog has been bitten by a tick is to watch for any symptoms of disease spread by ticks. This generally includes fever, lethargy, low appetite, or sore joints or muscles. If you notice symptoms, make an appointment with your private veterinarian to have your dog checked out.

What does a positive test mean? Does my dog need medication?

The blood test for diseases spread by ticks checks for whether the dog has been exposed to that disease, not whether they have an active infection. Many dogs may become exposed to disease and fight it off on their own, never developing symptoms or needing medication. Depending on which disease your dog tests positive for, we may recommend obtaining additional follow-up tests at your private veterinarian.

A positive test does mean your dog was exposed to ticks and using preventative medication would be a good idea.



Can my dog still get a tickborne disease if they are on prevention all season?

While the modern medications used for tick prevention are extremely effective, dogs can still be bitten if a dose is missed, if the medication is vomited up, if ticks come out earlier or survive later than the typical season, or if the density of ticks is very high.

Does my cat need tick prevention?

Cats who go outdoors should be on tick prevention April to November. While cats in the Toronto area are at extremely low risk for diseases spread by ticks, indoor/outdoor cats could bring ticks into your home which could then put humans or other pets at risk of disease. It is essential that cats take tick prevention medications that are specifically made for cats, as many dog products are toxic to cats.

