

Do Dogs Need Flea and Tick Medicine in the Winter?

Written by [Small Door's medical experts](#)

For a lot of people—and their pets!—summer means spending time outdoors. That also means flea and tick preventatives are especially important in the warmer months to keep your pets free of bites and infestations. But what about the rest of the year, when these pests seem to decrease in numbers: is it still important to apply preventatives?



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The answer is yes, flea and tick preventatives need to be applied year-round in order to keep your pets safe. Read on to learn more about how fleas and ticks operate, the dangers they can harbor, and how best to protect your dogs and cats.

Facts about fleas

Fleas are resilient pests—and because they like a cozy, heated environment whether indoors or out, they're more than happy to make themselves at home in your home, year-round. They live on dogs and cats to feed on their blood and lay eggs in their fur. (A female flea can lay several hundred to several thousand eggs in her lifetime, so if you catch sight of a single flea, you should know there are way more where that came from.) The eggs fall off of your pet and into the nooks and crannies of your house before hatching.

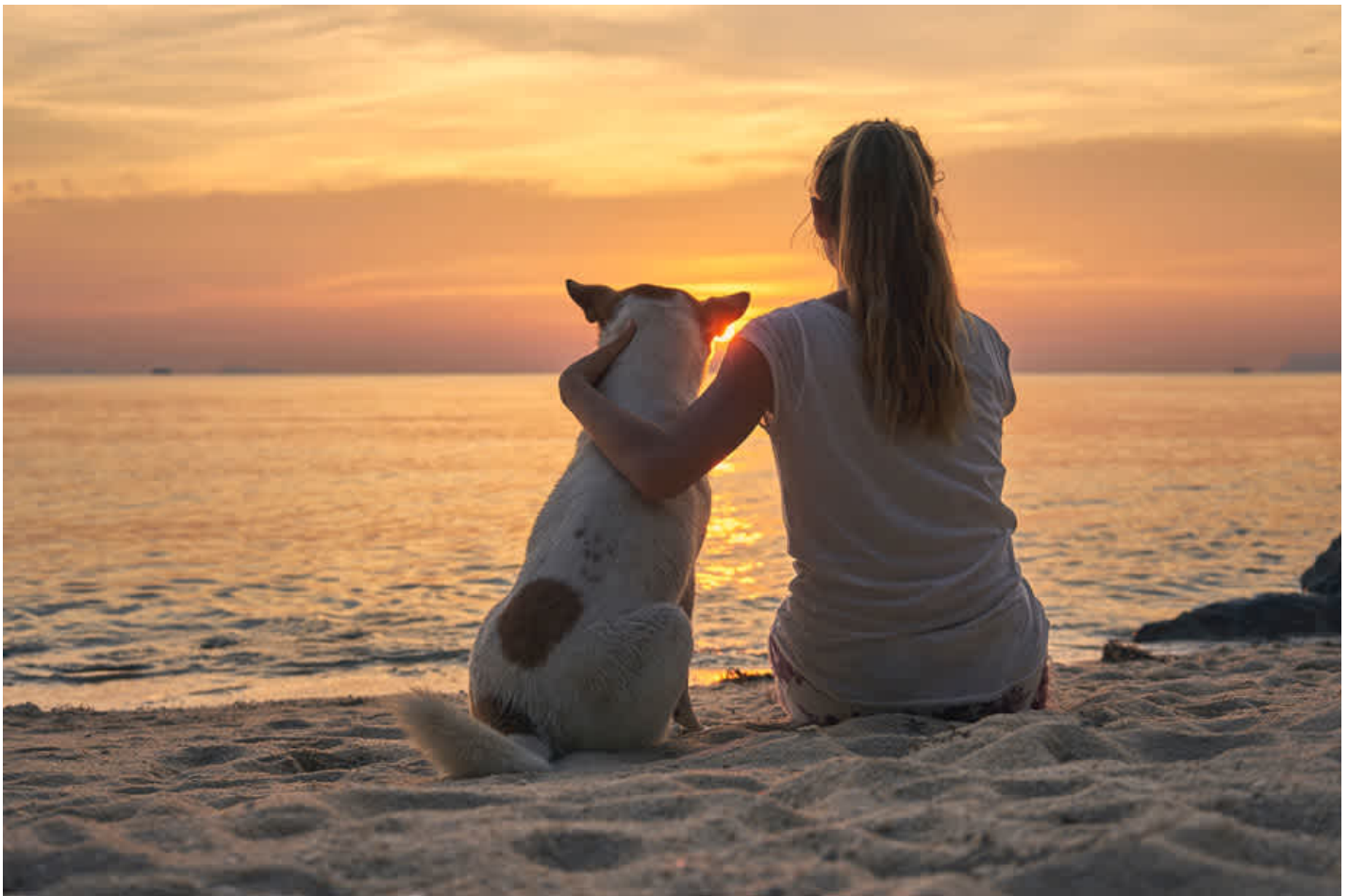
When dealing with a flea problem, not only does the pet need to be treated but the environment as well. Washing the pet's bedding in hot water, vacuuming and home 'bombs' or foggers are all strategies to help remove and/or kill flea eggs- all of which can be labor-intensive and why prevention is superior to reaction.

Your best bet at preventing a [flea infestation](#) is year-round compliance with preventatives. Applications should feel routine, rather than stop-start. Simply set a calendar or phone alert for the same day each month, and take a couple of minutes to prevent a big headache down the line.

[#tick]Facts about ticks

Ticks are most active during the warmer months and go into hibernation when it's very cold out. It is important to note that they're active during a wide range of temperatures. In fact, many species of ticks go dormant (typically under leaves or other outdoor debris) only when temperatures dip below 35F, or there's snow on the ground, however, just a short period of warming and they can become active again. Deer ticks are particularly hardy and can become active and look for a food source (your pet!) even after moderate to severe frosts if the daytime temperature warms a bit. Ticks also will not die during the winter months until the temperature falls below 10F for a sustained number of days.

Year-round tick prevention ensures that you and your pet won't be at the whim of unexpected warm spells or weather patterns. Plus, your pet will be protected during unexpectedly late dormancy periods, and early hatches from an unseasonably warm or early spring.



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Do dogs need flea and tick medicine in the winter?

In short, yes, your dog needs flea and tick prevention during the winter months. While it's true that tick and flea species slow down during the winter when outdoor temperatures drop, fleas can easily find their way in your home and onto your pet during the winter. Fleas can survive outdoor temperatures as low as 33 degrees fahrenheit and many species of ticks as low as 32 degrees — and oftentimes all it takes is a warm spell and these parasites can become active again.

Risks of ticks in the winter

Ticks are most active during the late summer and early fall, but some species are active year round depending on geographical location. South western black legged ticks tend to remain active during the winter, putting your dog at risk for getting them, especially if they spend a lot of time outdoors.

Gulf Coast Ticks are a species native to the southern United States that are active in temperatures as low as 39 degrees — typically year round in this region since many locations don't drop below that temperature even in the winter. Gulf Coast ticks are especially dangerous as infection can lead to paralysis.

Risks of fleas in the winter

While fleas are more of a nuisance for dogs compared to the danger ticks pose, they're often present year round as even when the weather drops, fleas find refuge indoors. Fleas can also become highly active with sudden warm spells and their life cycle makes it difficult and time consuming to rid your home and dog of them completely.

Do dogs need flea and tick medicine every month?

The best way to prevent and ward off fleas is to keep your dog on flea and tick medication year-round. Most preventative medications, both topical and oral versions, need to be taken monthly to remain effective. However, select treatments may protect your dog for longer, and so do not need to be taken as frequently. It's best to confirm the precise schedule with your veterinarian to ensure your dog is protected all year round.

Why flea and tick prevention is important

Remember, fleas and ticks aren't just pesky irritations—the harm they cause can go far beyond mere itchiness. Ticks can transmit [Lyme disease to dogs](#) (amongst other tick-borne illnesses), while [skin allergies](#) caused or exacerbated by fleas can lead to sores and infection. Fleas can also transmit an internal parasite, the [tapeworm](#), which can cause malnutrition and weight loss in your pet. Furthermore, the cost of eradicating flea infestations from your home can be quite high.

Finally, don't forget that flea and tick preventatives for your pet help protect your human family as well. Flea bites can cause skin irritation in humans as well, while Lyme-carrying ticks that are brought in from the outdoors by your pets can easily hop off and attach to the humans in your household.

As the old adage goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Spending a minute or two, once every month, in the application of flea and tick preventatives can save you a lot of time, hassle, pain, and money down the road. So no matter what the temperature, keep up the routine year-round.