

# 6 Best Tick Treatments for Dogs

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Photo-Illustration: The Strategist; Photos: Retailers

[Best overall](#)

[Best oral](#)

[Best combination tick and heartworm prevention](#)

[Best topical](#)

[Best \(less expensive\) topical](#)

[Best tick collar](#)

[Other Strategist-approved products for repelling ticks](#)

If you've ever had to remove a fully engorged [tick](#) from the folds of skin behind your [dog's](#) ear, you know that keeping the tiny pests at bay is a battle, even in the best of times. [Tick](#) season used to be a spring and summer thing; depending on where you live, you'd typically get a break come late fall, with cold weather killing off a lot of them. But now it can be tick season year-round, thanks to [warmer](#)

[winters](#) and [growing populations](#) of the deer, mice, and other creatures that ticks love to bury their Lyme-disease-carrying heads in.

If unprotected, dogs can contract lots of nasty illnesses from ticks, including [Lyme disease](#), canine ehrlichiosis, canine anaplasmosis, [canine babesiosis](#), and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. And I have learned the hard way that keeping ticks off your dog is an important step in keeping ticks off you and your family, too. (Just because a tick starts off on your dog doesn't mean it won't end up catching a ride into your living room and burrowing its way into your thigh while you watch *Love Is Blind* on the couch.)

Because ticks can be tiny and easy to miss — deer ticks that carry [Lyme disease](#) are often as small as poppy seeds — regular tick checks are essential, especially if you [take your dog hiking](#), play with them in areas with a lot of tall grass, or live in the [prime tick country of the Northeast](#). The best way to check for ticks is to “run your hands through your dog's fur against the direction it normally lays. This allows you to see down to the skin, even on very furry dogs,” says veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Coates, who serves on the advisory board for [Pup Life Today](#). You should pay close attention to your dog's face, ears, belly, groin, and feet, and if you find any ticks, remove them right away with [fine-point tweezers](#) or a [tick key](#). After a tick bite, if your dog displays any warning symptoms — which include joint pain, limping or lameness, swollen lymph nodes, fever, lethargy, or decreased appetite — speak to your vet as soon as possible, as tick-borne illnesses can be fatal.

Still, performing regular tick checks on your dog won't prevent *all* bites, which is why veterinarians recommend that dog owners, no matter where they live, consider a preventative treatment (since ticks can also be found in [city parks](#)). To help you find the most effective tick prevention for your dog, we asked veterinarians, plus our own writers and editors, to recommend the products they like best. Their favorites take different forms — from chews to topical treatments and wearable collars — and because some require a prescription from your vet, you may notice fewer (but all expert-approved) options on this list.

Tick-prevention medications come in three main categories: oral chews, topical treatments you apply to the skin, and collars embedded with medication to repel ticks. Most topical treatments and tick collars use insecticides that repel ticks so they jump off your dog's body before biting them. Oral medications absorb into a dog's bloodstream and then into the tissue fluids just under their skin; when a tick bites the dog, the medication in their body is transferred to the tick, which then dies before it has a chance to infect your dog with Lyme or any other illnesses it might be carrying. Because oral medications kill the ticks instead of just repelling them, they also help prevent future infestations where topical treatments and collars usually don't.

Whichever method of prevention you prefer, all our experts agree that you should stick to newer classes of repellents and medications, since ticks have become resistant to certain chemicals over

time. For example, according to Dr. Jamie Richardson of New York City's [Small Door Veterinary](#), "Frontline has been around for 25 years now, and it's not as effective as it was when it first hit the market. It definitely works for some, but not for all." Below, we've listed the active ingredients in each recommendation; as always, it's best to consult your veterinarian before starting a new treatment.

Tick-prevention medications are designed to be poisonous to insects but not harmful to mammals (like you, me, and our dogs). But because oral treatments are prescription medications and all tick treatments have potential side effects, even the ones sold over the counter, finding the best one for your dog should always start with a conversation with your vet, especially if you have a puppy, a toy breed dog, or a dog with preexisting health conditions. For instance, some oral tick preventatives, including the ones mentioned below, are not recommended for dogs with a history of uncontrolled seizures. But Richardson, whose own dog takes one of the treatments on our list (Nexgard), told us that the risk of seizures from taking tick prevention medication is rare and that the benefits far outweigh this risk. "In my [career] as a vet, I have treated probably thousands of dogs with severe and sometimes life-threatening tick-borne diseases, but I have never treated any dogs with the side effects known to these medications," she explains. Another benefit of oral tick treatments is they don't pose a danger to other pets or children in the home, which isn't necessarily the case with topical treatments, and your dog won't have to wait several days to swim or bathe after taking them.

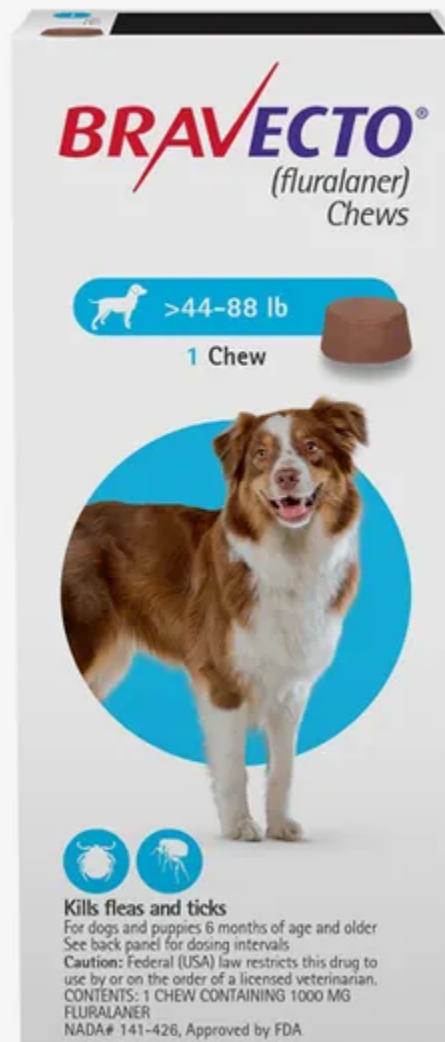
That said, Richardson does recommend topical treatments for dogs with gastrointestinal issues. "If, when they eat anything out of the ordinary, they have a tendency to vomit, then the oral probably isn't the best product for them," she says. There are dozens of topical tick repellents on the market, many of which are sold over the counter. Still, while you may find some for less money or see an all-natural spray that sounds safe to use at the pet store, you should always discuss the ingredients with your vet. As Richardson explains, "some over-the-counter products have been associated with pretty nasty side effects." And when it comes to natural alternatives to flea and tick prevention, both Richardson and Dr. Tory Waxman, a veterinarian and the co-founder of dog-food brand [Sundays](#), are wary: "A lot of people use tea-tree oil, but it actually can be pretty poisonous to dogs," says Waxman, noting that essential oils and other over-the-counter treatments are not as well regulated as prescription products.

Since dogs come in a wide variety of sizes from teacup to giant breed, dog medications come in a variety of weight-based dosages. In general, this makes buying the safest and most effective medication possible for all dog owners. And since my own dog, Uli, weighs just five pounds — a size that is vulnerable to potential overdose — I put more trust in brands that offer clearly labeled options for many different sizes of dogs.

Depending on where you live (the Northeast versus Alaska, for instance) and how active your dog is, it might make more sense to give them one dose of medication that lasts several months instead of

having to remember to give them their medication every month. But for dogs who spend limited time in tick-infested areas, individual monthly doses could be convenient.

The cost of each tick treatment varies depending on the brand and the length of protection provided. But whether you're planning to buy a few doses or enough to last an entire year, it's helpful to know the starting price of a single unit. We've listed the approximate cost of each treatment per month based on the retail price.



**Type:** Prescription medication, oral and topical form | **Active ingredients:** Fluralaner | **Dose range:** Five dosages | **Duration:** Three months | **Approximate cost per month:** Starts at \$24

Bravecto was mentioned by all of the vets we talked to, with Waxman telling us her own dog takes the chewable oral treatment. It is also what I give my five-pound dog Uli, whose gray fur makes finding ticks very difficult. According to the vets, its main appeal over other oral treatments is that it protects dogs from ticks and fleas for three months at a time, as opposed to one month at a time. The [chewable](#)

[tablets](#) are meat-flavored, so you won't have to hide any pills in peanut butter or cheese, and they are available in different sizes for dogs from (roughly) four to 123 pounds.

To say Uli is a fan of Bravecto would be a lie, but she does happily eat the chew and it has kept her safe from fleas and ticks for many years. Dr. Alejandro Caos, a veterinarian at [the Vets](#), also gives Bravecto to his own rescue Sharky and likes that it starts killing embedded ticks in as little as 12 hours and fleas in as little as two hours, which is ideal if you don't follow a year-round dosing schedule. He also says his dog never experiences any adverse side effects, like diarrhea or vomiting. Like Caos, [Fable Pets](#) co-founder Jeremy Canade gives Bravecto to his border collie Ranger and says he appreciates that the pup is always prepared for an impromptu hike or a trip to the park. Plus, Ranger likes the chews so much that he sometimes "picks them out of his food and brings them over to the couch to enjoy as a special [treat](#)," Canade says. Most clinics will carry Bravecto, but you can order it online with a prescription from a veterinarian.

Sakura Davis, a veterinary technician and consultant who gives her dog Bravecto's oral treatment, is also a fan of the brand's topical solution. It uses the same active ingredient that is found in chewable tablets, which means the topical will also protect your dog for three months at a time.