

Flea and Tick Prevention and Treatment for Dogs

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Preventative care is a key part of keeping your dog healthy and happy. One of the best ways you can prevent potential health issues is to use monthly flea and tick preventatives.

Why Is Flea and Tick Prevention Important for Dogs?

Fleas and ticks are ectoparasites, meaning they are pests that live on the outside of their host.

For fleas and tick to survive, they must bite their host and then feed on the blood. These bites can directly impact your dog's health. The saliva from a flea bite can cause severe allergies, [dermatitis](#), anemia, itching, and infection. Tick bites can cause infection, abscesses, paralysis, and even death.

These nasty parasites can also harbor and spread a variety of diseases to dogs, including:

- [Lyme disease](#)
- [Anaplasmosis](#)
- Bartonellosis
- Rocky Mountain Spotted fever
- [Tapeworms](#)
- Babesiosis

Some of these diseases are even zoonotic, which means they can spread to you and your family. That is why it's critical to keep fleas and ticks off your dog, as well as out of your home.

When Do Dogs Need Flea and Tick Prevention?

Flea and ticks survive and thrive in mild to moderate weather, so it's crucial to protect your pets during the warmer months. If you live in areas where the temperature stays warm year-round, then you should make sure you pet is on flea and tick prevention all year.

However, even northern states frequently experience a few warm, spring-like days during the winter months. These brief warm periods provide fleas and ticks enough time to get on your pets and in your house. Once inside, fleas can continue to reproduce, living in the floorboards, carpets, and anywhere your pet lives. If your dog isn't using a tick preventive, ticks may even crawl off your dog and onto the humans in the house.

What Are Flea and Tick Preventatives for Dogs?

There are a variety of products to help [keep your dog free of parasites](#). These products can be in the form of pesticides, repellents, or growth inhibitors. Each of these types of preventatives tackle pests at different lifestages to prevent infestations.

Some products are only effective against one species, typically fleas. These include products such as flea dips, baths, and powders. To ensure your dog has coverage for both fleas and ticks, you may need additional medications.

Combination flea and tick preventatives for dogs contain multiple ingredients to battle different types of pests. These prevention options typically provide coverage for both fleas and ticks, but may also provide additional protection against heartworm, mites, or intestinal parasites.

Before deciding on a flea and tick medication, always check with your veterinarian and make sure it is a good fit for your dog. You will want to check the product label and consult with your veterinarian to make sure:

- The product is the correct species for your pet (dog vs cat)
- The product is intended for your pet's life stage: puppy, adult, or senior
- The product is within the correct weight range for your pet
- The product is administered correctly (is it a chewable or a topical treatment)
- The product protects against the appropriate parasites
- If the product should be given with food
- How often you should administer the product
- How long before the product starts working
- When you can bathe your pet
- If the product has any other safety-related concerns
- You have the correct phone numbers to call in the event of an adverse reaction

Even if you've previously used the medication, re-read the package insert, as the warnings and directions may have changed. Follow all instructions exactly and contact your veterinarian or the product's company if you have any questions.

Choosing a Flea and Tick Combination Medicine for Dogs

There is no shortage of options when it comes to flea and tick prevention options for dogs, so finding the best one can feel overwhelming. Your veterinarian is a great resource for narrowing down your search and finding the best fit.

Here are 7 factors to consider as you determine what type of flea and tick medicine is the best for your dog.

Application Method

Flea and tick preventatives most commonly come in two forms:

1. **Oral:** Chewable tablet that your dog ingests

2. **Topical:** Liquid that is spread between the shoulder blades or down the back of your dog

Topical flea and tick preventatives are a great option for pets that are picky eaters or have sensitive stomachs. However, if you have small children or other animals, you need to be careful that they don't touch or lick the product before it has time to dry.

Spot-on flea and tick options may have a medicinal smell or cause transient itching/irritation or even hair loss. Topical treatments are also not a great option for dogs that like to swim a lot or dogs that need frequent baths. Water can affect the efficacy of the product.

Oral treatments can be an easy and convenient option for dog parents because they can be given like a treat. If you use oral treatments, it's best to monitor your dog to make sure they have eaten the entire tablet and do not throw it up before it can be absorbed into their system.

If your dog vomits after eating an oral flea and tick preventative, call your veterinarian for instructions on re-dosing, as well as to report a potential reaction to the product. Feeding oral preventatives with a meal may help decrease upset stomach as well as help with product absorption.

Geography

Different geographic locations have different local parasite populations, including fleas and ticks, as well as other parasites such as [heartworms](#) and [intestinal worms](#).

The [Companion Animal Parasite Council](#) is a helpful resource to identify the parasites in your area so that you can make sure whichever flea and tick product you choose keeps your dog fully protected.