

Now that spring has arrived, pet owners need to be wary of parasites

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Spring is here and with it comes an increased exposure to all kinds of internal and external parasites.

Mosquitoes, fleas and ticks are not only pesky critters; they can be the source of serious pet and human illnesses. Mosquitoes are the carrier of the heartworm parasite to dogs and cats. Fortunately, neither pet is susceptible to the West Nile virus that these little guys can transmit from birds to people.

Fleas are nearly everywhere, and even a little backyard-exposure-only pet has frequent flea challenges. Virtually all squirrels, rabbits, opossums, raccoons, mice and voles are heavily infested with fleas. Fleas are very efficient parasites and they are always looking to establish new feeding grounds. Fleas cause problems in the form of flea bite allergic dermatitis and may transmit several diseases, including tapeworms to our pets.

Tick exposure is not just a cottage or camping phenomenon. Deer population may be a driving factor, but birds are now known to play a much larger role as tick hosts. Ticks can transmit all kinds of nasty things, but chiefly we think of Lyme disease, Ehrlichia, Anaplasma and Rocky Mountain spotted fever being transmitted to people and dogs.

Preventing these parasites on our pets is now recognized by public health officials as an important human health objective. Pets patrol the yard and house, get into all those interesting little nooks and crannies, and then come in to rest in our chairs or possibly on the bed. Thus our pets can become the public transit system to deliver some interesting passengers directly into our laps.

Now is the time to step up parasite protection for your beloved cats and dogs.

A multibillion dollar industry will be advertising for your parasite protection money this spring. How do you choose? It's not easy to balance killing ticks, fleas, and mosquitoes and yet not harm the pets, their companions or our environment.

The key point in selecting the best protection program for your pets is to use your veterinary care team. It has been trained to respect and preserve your health. The goal is to help tailor a safe and effective program for your particular lifestyle, using both prescription and non-prescription products.