

Paw Prints #8 March '07
Spring Parasite Concerns
Dr. Pat Mahoney, DVM

Spring is here and Wisconsin is such a beautiful place for us to live! But as you know, our weather generally promotes an outside insect season from April through November, and with it comes the increased exposure to all kinds of internal and external parasites. Mosquitoes, fleas, and ticks are not only pesky critters by themselves, but they can also 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 'back-yard-exposure-only' pet has frequent flea challenges. Virtually all squirrels, rabbits, opossums, raccoons, mice, and voles - you get the idea - are heavily infested with fleas. They are very efficient parasites and they are always looking to establish new feeding grounds! Fleas can cause quite their own little problem in the form of flea bite allergic dermatitis, called FAD, and they can also transmit several diseases, including tapeworms, to our pets.

Tick exposure is not as common in the city, but can occur here. At far greater risk for ticks are those pets that enjoy the trails, parks, cottages, and outings that make Wisconsin such a great place to be outside with our pet friends! Ticks can transmit all kinds of nasties, but chiefly we think of Lyme disease, Ehrlichia, 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 too. Thus our pets can become the public transit system to deliver some interesting passengers directly into our laps.

In the last few years the effectiveness and safety of our parasite control products has improved. It's not easy to balance killing ticks, fleas, and mosquitoes and yet not harm the pets, their companions, or the environment!

The key point in selecting the best protection program for your pets is to **use your veterinary care team**. They have been trained, they respect

your health and our environment, and importantly **they have access to prescription only products** that truly are better! For example, a product that was heavily advertised last year is deadly to pet cats. Even when properly applied to the family dog, enough can rub off on a cat up to two days later to affect the cat. The product was advertised as repelling the mosquitoes that carry West Nile Virus, which is not a risk for dogs or cats, and is a much older product revamped with an additive to make it "new." A multibillion dollar industry will be advertising for your money this spring ... please trust your veterinarian!

Until next month, healthy pets, happy people! Dr Pat Mahoney
Dr. Pat Mahoney is the owner of American Animal Hospital in Neenah, an AAHA certified pet care clinic. To submit your pet related questions for a future column, go to the e-mail link at www.ameranimal.com