

LYME DISEASE

WHAT IS IT?

Lyme Disease is a disease caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. The disease in people begins with fatigue, headache, and often a characteristic rash. If left untreated, the disease may progress to include cardiac, neurologic, and arthritic signs. Diseased pets will often only show arthritic signs, which may occur with fatigue and reluctance to eat.

WHO CAN GET IT?

Lyme Disease was initially described in people, but the organism has been found in many wild animals. Horses, cows, and cats may harbor the bacteria, but the dog is most commonly infected.

HOW IS IT TRANSMITTED?

The disease is transmitted by the bite of a tick. Some biting insects have been found carrying the organism, but they are not considered as major transmitters of the disease. There is no evidence that you can get the disease from your pet, but your pet could bring infected ticks into your yard or house. Most of the signs of Lyme Disease are reported in the spring to fall, when tick populations are the highest.

WHERE DOES IT OCCUR?

Lyme Disease appears to have a worldwide distribution. Cases have been reported in at least 30 of the United States, but 86% of these cases originated in only 7 states. The areas with highest activity are the northeastern seaboard, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and northern California. If you reside in or travel to these areas, your pet could have an increased chance of exposure to this disease.

WHAT DOES A POSITIVE TEST MEAN?

A positive antibody test for the *Borrellia* organism shows that at some point your pet has been exposed to this organism and may now be a healthy carrier or may have an active infection and be sick. The test is performed to screen pets for exposure and to help evaluate clinical signs where the disease could be a possibility.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

The disease is readily treated with antibiotics. The earlier in the course of the disease treatment is begun, the better the chance for complete cure. Your pet may appear well after only a couple of days of medication, but it is important to continue giving the drug for the full time period or your pet may show signs again.

HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

When you and your pet venture into areas that may be infested with ticks, you should take precautions to avoid infection with Lyme disease or other tick-transmitted diseases. Apply repellents to yourself, and regularly use flea and tick insecticides on your pet. Check yourself and your pet for attached ticks, and remove them with tweezers. Do not crush ticks between your fingers, or you could become infected.

A vaccine is now available for this disease. Your veterinarian will evaluate the need for vaccination of Lyme disease for your particular pet.