

TICK FEVER IN DOGS

The purpose of this article is to outline how this disease carried by ticks can affect our dogs and what we can do to reduce the possibility of infection. The main tick borne disease of south west France is known by several names – Babesiosis, Piroplasmosis, Tick Fever.

It is a life threatening disease, which can lead to complications such as kidney failure.

What are ticks?

Ticks are insects. They attach themselves to an infected mammal (deer, sheep, dog etc) and feed by puncturing a vein, that is, it feeds on blood.



In doing so, the parasite which is in the red blood cells, enters the tick. The tick then drops off and lays eggs which develop into a generation of infected ticks. Ticks are attracted to warmth, and so will attach to a dog (or other mammal) when passing. It will then have a blood meal, passing the parasite into the dog's bloodstream in the process.

The parasite invades the red blood cells, causing the body to recognise that they are different and therefore reject and destroy them.

The ticks are most active when it is warm and wet i.e. spring and autumn. It is worth noting that the change in the climate giving us warmth up to December means that the dogs are at

risk for a longer period of time than previously.

Signs to look out for –

Early signs are trembling and shivering. Depending on the severity of infection the dog will refuse food and is reluctant to leave his bed. This can happen very suddenly.

If you collect a urine sample, (easier in males than females!), you may find that it is not the normal yellow colour, but brown. This is the pigment from the red blood cells which are being destroyed. Also, the gums are paler due to the breakdown of red blood cells.

Those of you happy to wield a thermometer will find the temperature is often as high as 104°F or 40°C.

It is the rejection of the red blood cells which causes the clinical signs of lethargy, high temperature, discoloured urine (the pigments from the blood are excreted in the urine), yellowing of the skin, gums and around the eyes i.e. jaundice (when the amount of pigment broken down cannot be excreted quickly enough), muscle weakness and even convulsions.

If you suspect this disease, you must arrange for a vet to see your dog as soon as possible.

Diagnosis.

A definite diagnosis can be difficult, as a blood smear (taken from the ear or a toe) does not always show the parasite. However the vet will use his experience, and as rapid treatment is the key to success, will often treat your

pet regardless of whether the parasite is found.

There are blood tests to determine if there is a low grade infection, or to determine if the dog is reacting to an infection, but these take time to analyse and again, treatment is usually started before a result is obtained.

Treatment.

The basis of treatment is an injection which kills the parasite, and this can be repeated after several days.

Occasionally antibiotics are also given, and supportive therapy such as a drip or anti vomiting drugs can be useful. Other than that, lots of tender loving care, to persuade your pet to recover is the most valuable tool.

Prevention of the disease.

There are several pathways to follow,

- Firstly using anti tick treatments, such as Frontline, Advantix or Promeris is very useful. These are easy to apply. They must be applied to the skin and not on the hair.
- If using the Frontline pump spray, it is important to know your dog's weight so the number of pumps can be calculated. For example a 30kg Labrador needs 60 pumps of the 250 or 500ml pump bottle!
- There is an effective anti tick collar available called Scalibor, which can also be used with frontline or advantix.
- There is the obvious option of **checking your dog over daily for ticks**, especially around the neck, ears, armpits, groin, and

between toes. The ease of this task varies greatly depending on the coat of the dog. The ticks can be easily removed using specially developed tools, available from pet shops and vets.

- **Vaccination** can help, they are 80-90% effective but are expensive.

Most pet owners in the UK are aware that if they bring a dog from mainland Europe into the UK, they must treat it with an anti tick treatment. However, how many treat **before** visiting mainland Europe with their dog? There is a real need to treat your dog with a proven anti-tick treatment prior to your visit.

The manufacturers recommend monthly dosing with Advantix or Frontline to control ticks, local vets often advise every 3 weeks during periods of danger. Some people alternate advantix with frontline when dosing every 3 weeks as they are different chemicals.

Ticks also carry other diseases such as Ehrlichiosis which will be covered in a different factsheet.

Any questions on this factsheet, please feel free to email or phone Diana James on vet2u@wanadoo.fr, or 06 32 23 77 08, or contact your veterinary surgeon.