

BowWOW

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

### The EEUuuww of Ticks

Ticks, no doubt the South Carolina state parasite, are small arachnids, or spiders, that live on the blood of mammals, birds, occasionally reptiles, amphibians and certainly, your dog. A harpoon-like mouth arrangement with a series of barbs that angle backward, anchors the tick in place while feeding. The barbs are why ticks are so difficult to remove once they get a grip.

While they feed, ticks also spread diseases including Erlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, Lyme disease and Tularemia.

Ticks might be a shade less revolting if they were re-named “Puffies” or “Swellums,” but even that is a stretch given their high creepy factor. There is very little, except a stiff drink, that can offset the groan you emit when you find a tick lodged in your dog’s armpit, eight legs waving gaily. Ticks tend to go for the warm, secluded areas like inner ears, under the collar or between the toes. Primary tick offenders are often female, so once you find her, be sure to check around nearby for an opportunistic male or two.

Except for tick removal specialists and the folks who have no nerves whatsoever, there has to be a universal Eeeeeuuuww response to finding a tick on your pet. Then there’s the equally Eeeeeuuuww response to the old wives methods of removal. One frightening procedure recommends holding a lighted cigarette on the engorged tick until it dies. Not a great solution if you don’t smoke or if you have unsteady hands. Dogs aren’t too crazy about this method, as you might imagine.

Another remedy is to “smother” the tick to death with a gob of Vaseline. Since ticks breathe only a few times per hour, that method takes quite a long time - if it works at all. Plus, getting a good grip on a greasy tick for the tug-off is almost impossible. And then your dog is greasy, too. There’s also the passive procedure of letting the tick hang on until it is engorged and then falls off into the carpet. The drawback is that it will reappear in an armpit at a later date when it gets hungry again.

The first goal of immediate removal is to kill the tick so it will wither up and withdraw its probe-head from the skin. There is a risk of infection if the

tick's head is left under the skin and only the body removed. There is a risk of infection if anything is left under any skin, let alone something with a face.

A swift and reliable removal practice, as demonstrated by a veterinarian, is to dab the head end of the tick, not the head exactly because that is buried in your dog but the shoulders of the tick, with a swab soaked in some kind of insecticide. The vet used Bio-Spot because that's what she had handy. Raid (or anything else that claims to kill bugs dead!) also works. Just be sure to wash the remaining non-mammal-friendly chemicals from the area.

Upon application of the insecticide the tick will wave its legs about frantically but then die obligingly, all within about three seconds. Grab the little creepy close to the skin and give a smart tug. It may surprise you how tightly these guys have clamped on; they definitely mean business when they set up for a hot meal. Try not to grab the body of the tick, the now puffy part, as you want to minimize the risk of potential disease-carrying saliva back-flow into your dog. Again, EEUuuww.

After you perform the final tug would be the time to emit another little exclamation of disgust, shaking your hands in the air to dislodge the invisible cootie energy as you safely dispose of the wretched offender. Then, to be safe, clean the area with peroxide and dab a little antiseptic ointment onto the wound.

I love to talk about dogs. Want more information? Have a question? Send a note to me at [letstalk@wholedog.biz](mailto:letstalk@wholedog.biz) or visit [www.wholedog.biz](http://www.wholedog.biz) for the whole story.