

Editorial Board

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Iain is an RCVS recognised Advanced Veterinary Practitioner in Zoological Medicine. He runs his own practice at Newmarket Vets4Pets.

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Ian Wright BVMS BSc MSc MRCVS

Ian has a Master's degree in Veterinary Parasitology and is a member of the European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites (ESCCAP UK and Ireland).

There can't be too much tick awareness

Although, tick bites can occur at any time of year, warmer temperatures from March until October make this much more likely. Tick bite prevention week from the 22 to 28 March each year marks the start of concerted efforts by many medical and veterinary organisations to raise awareness of the need for tick prevention while enjoying the great outdoors. Tick events such as this, as well as tick and Lyme disease awareness month (both in May), are important to maintain awareness of the disease threats that ticks pose to both pets and people, and are a great opportunity for veterinary practices to coordinate their own tick awareness campaigns. The media spotlight tends to shine on ticks when there is a novel disease outbreak or celebrity case. This can create a short-term spike in awareness and pet owner panic, as was seen during the *Babesia* outbreak in Essex and the establishment of tick-borne encephalitis virus in the south of England. The threat these diseases pose to human and animal health is often lower than media reports suggest, but the risks remain long after tabloids have forgotten about them. Tick-borne encephalitis virus is a good example of how widespread media coverage led to increased tick prevention enquiries in many practices from panicked pet owners in the New and Thetford forests. Although, tick prevention in these areas was already required as there has long been high incidence areas for Lyme disease.

Tick awareness campaigns are a great opportunity to get the message out to pet owners. Risks need to be mitigated, with the importance of tick bite prevention measures emphasised through strategies such as the US Center for Disease Control's 'stay on the path' advertisements. Keeping dogs on leads will help to limit their foraging, but wandering dogs will inevitably need an effective tick preventative product that rapidly kills or repels ticks. Although, none of these products are 100% effective, so informing clients how to check for ticks and remove them safely to send them for identification is also important. Cats that investigate animal burrows can also become regularly infested and require protection.

Vets should also give pet owners simple sensible advice to avoid ticks themselves, such as tucking socks into boots and covering body parts likely to come into contact with undergrowth, as well as checking themselves and their pets for ticks after walks. There are also tick and fly repellency options available for pets and owners.

The role of dogs as hosts for zoonotic tick-borne disease should be highlighted to clients. Although there is limited direct zoonotic risk from infected pets, it is likely that owners may have been exposed to the same populations of infected ticks while walking their dogs. While emphasising the need not to panic, tick awareness events are the perfect opportunity to remind clients that their dogs may be the best early warning surveillance tool of exposure to tick-borne diseases.



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