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Prevention is Key to Keeping Your Dog Safe This Spring

By M. Kathleen Shaw, DVM VVMA

Springtime is finally here, and with it comes many diseases and parasites that are easily preventable. Ticks, wildlife, gardening chemicals, and heartworm are just a few of the things to be aware of this time of year.

Wildlife encounters are easily preventable if you simply keep your dog on a leash when outside. Porcupines and skunks are out, and if your dog has ever had a run-in with one of them, you'll know it's no fun for either of you! A dog who you think will stay close to the house will easily stray if it smells something good or sees wildlife to chase. This is critical when you visit conservation areas with your dog: they can frighten the wildlife and disrupt their nesting. Dogs are also notorious for getting into things like the compost pile or rotten things they find in the woods, which can make them very sick.

Make sure your dog is up to date on its vaccinations including Rabies, Leptospirosis, and Lyme. Rabies vaccination is required by law. Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that is a concern anywhere the potential exists for contact with wild animal urine: ponds, streams, puddles, or even the grass in your back yard. It causes kidney and liver failure in dogs, and the scary thing is the dogs can transmit this disease to people, with the same consequences. The potential exists for your dog to be exposed even on a walk through the neighborhood, as wildlife is increasingly more populous as we encroach on their territory. There is a vaccination available for this deadly disease, so talk to your veterinarian about having your dogs vaccinated for it.

By now, most people have heard of Lyme Disease. It is carried by the deer tick, along with another disease called *Anaplasma*. A third tick borne disease we are now seeing is called *Ehrlichia*. While there is a vaccination for Lyme, there is *not* one for *Anaplasma* or *Ehrlichia*, so it is critical that you have some kind of preventative on your dog. There are now excellent options for tick control including collars, topicals, and even pills that last for 1 or 3 months. Even with the Lyme vaccination and tick control for your dog, you should check it over each time on coming in from outside. Sometimes the ticks may be out on the fur, away from the skin, and they can then latch on to you. For dark haired dogs, many people will use a hair roller to try to pick up any stray ticks on the dog. It's important to know that immature deer ticks, which can transmit these diseases, are tiny - much smaller than a sesame seed- so even if you don't see the large tick, the small ones can be there. A tick collar or other preventative is a small price to pay to protect your best friend from these deadly diseases.

Mosquitos are out and they carry heartworm disease to your dog, which can also be fatal. Heartworm disease is easily prevented with a medication in the form of a once-a-month chewable treat, available through your veterinarian. The disease can be fatal to your dog, and the price of a lifetime of heartworm prevention for your dog is still going to cost less than the treatment if your dog contracts heartworm (let alone the damage done to your dog's heart and lungs from the disease).

And finally, as you start your yard and garden work, be aware of the chemicals you're using. Read the directions carefully - if they are toxic to weeds or insects, they are most likely toxic to your dog. Keep them stored safe and up high. Avoid cocoa mulch, as it has some of the chemicals found in chocolate, and for dogs who like to feast on it, it can make them very ill. With some simple prevention this time of year, you can keep your beloved dog safe. Talk to your veterinarian about vaccinations and tick/heartworm preventatives and for more information go to veterinarypartner.com.

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