



WORMING, FLEA TREATMENT AND TICK CONTROL

One of the topics which concerns many dog owners is how to prevent and control intestinal worms and external parasites like fleas and ticks. Most dogs will suffer from one of these at some time in their lives; it's important to mention at this point that although parasites will infect healthy dogs, they really flourish when they attack and colonise weak and sick animals. The principal thing you can do for your dog to prevent infestation is to ensure he or she is as strong and healthy as possible. Diet plays a vital role in this process and foods which are as close to a natural diet as possible, with a minimum of highly processed ingredients will help to build and maintain a strong immune system. Worms in particular, thrive in the environment created by the sugars and carbohydrates found in the inferior quality kibbles.

It is most important to keep your pet free from infection because some of the parasites which infect dogs and cats can be passed on to you and your children where they can lead to health problems including blindness.

WORMING

There is a common myth that you will know if your dog has worms because if they are infected, they will see worms in the faeces or your dog will spend a lot of time scooting their bottom around the floor, however this does not happen with all types of worm. To ensure that your dog is free from worms, you should use one of the following regimes.

Chemical tablets, liquid and paste: After the initial worming routine carried out by the breeder of your puppy, your vet will advise on the frequency of worming required up until 6 months of age. Thereafter, the recommendation is that your dog should be wormed approximately twice every year. There is a wide variety of chemical wormers available and if you choose to use these, it is advisable to buy from a reliable source; as a rule of thumb, the cheaper worming products sold in your supermarket are not as effective as those you buy from your vet or large pet store. Some vets are now advising owners to worm their dog every month, but it is worth considering the chemical burden you are placing on your dog's system when he or she may not even have any worms to get rid of.

Natural worming products: If you are concerned about the effects on your dog's health from using the chemical methods of parasite prevention, there are some well-established natural products which you could use instead. Natural worming products are usually added to food and they work by making the gut an inhospitable environment for worms. There are several companies which produce natural wormers and the website below is a good starting point if you would like to find out more.

<https://www.myitchydog.co.uk/natural-worming.html>

Worm Count: Carrying out a worm count on your dog can give you peace of mind that he is free from internal parasites. Worm Count began as a service for farm animals and horses, but some laboratories are now offering this for companion animals; the price comparing favourably with the cost of worming products. The laboratory will send you a kit to enable you to collect a sample of your dog's stool in a

special container which you then post back to them. The sample is examined under a microscope to check for eggs and worms and the results are usually emailed or posted to you within 24 hours. You

can then make an informed decision whether you need to worm your dog or not. Using this method will allow you to avoid putting unnecessary chemicals into your dog's body.

<https://www.myitchydog.co.uk/my-itchy-dog-worm-egg-count-testing-kit.html>

<https://wormcount.com/companion-animals/>

<http://www.feclab.co.uk/egg-counts>

FLEA AND TICK TREATMENTS

As with wormers, if you choose to use a conventional treatment against fleas and ticks, there is a choice of products available from your vet or online canine chemist. These come in many different forms. Spot-on treatments, which you apply to the back of the dog, between the shoulder blades, work by spreading through the sub-cutaneous layer of fat under your dog's skin. If a flea bites or a tick tries to attach itself, they will ingest toxic chemicals which destroy them within 24 – 48 hours after contact with your dog. Pills given by mouth, flea collars, sprays, shampoos and powders all work by making your dog a toxic host for parasites, the chemicals used all work by destroying or damaging fleas and ticks. Some vets recommend that you treat your dog on a monthly basis, the theory being that in centrally heated homes, fleas can be active all year round. However, you may want to weigh up the convenience of these products against the reality that you will be putting a toxic substance into your dog's system which can, over time, cause nasty side effects. There are natural methods which you may choose to use to prevent your pet becoming infested.

Fleas: Flea prevention is definitely easier than getting rid of them once your dog becomes infected. If your dog does get fleas, it can be difficult to notice at first, particularly if he or she has a thick coat. Fleas spend most of their time in your furnishings and only jump onto the dog when they need a meal. If you haven't already spotted the adult fleas moving in the coat you will know you have a problem when your dog becomes irritated by the flea saliva and starts to itch and scratch. You may also find that you have been bitten by fleas jumping onto the wrong target. It is estimated that adult fleas only make up 5% of the population with the other 95% being the flea eggs, larvae and pupae which live in the environment, i.e. your home or backyard. The conventional spot-on methods of flea treatment are very efficient in getting rid of them if your dog is infected. With a spot-on treatment, the chemicals spread throughout the fat layer under the skin and remain active for 30 days. As the eggs hatch and develop into adult fleas, they are attracted to the dog where they will be destroyed after contact with his hair and skin. If your dog does have fleas, it is vital to treat your home at the same time, to get rid of any eggs, pupae or larvae which will be hiding in warm dark places such as pet beds, carpets, furnishings, skirting boards and cracks in floorboards. There are lots of different chemical products available from pet stores which you can use to get rid of both adult and developing fleas in your home.

If you are concerned about putting too many chemicals on or into your dog, you may like to consider natural methods of flea prevention. These are products which you either add to your dog's food or spray onto the dog's coat before going out for a walk. They all work by making your dog unattractive to fleas. There are too many different methods and products to mention here but if you search the internet for natural flea control you will find information and advice. One of the well-known companies who make natural flea and tick repellants can be found here:

<https://www.myitchydog.co.uk/csj-billy-no-mates-herbal-flea-tick-mite-repellant-for-dogs.html>

Ticks: Many of the conventional, chemical flea treatments also work on ticks but if you choose natural products for flea control, you may wish to also use a more natural method for controlling these parasites. Ticks are blood sucking insects which attach themselves to a host animal to feed on blood. They look like tiny, pale white spiders but as they feed they become bigger and darker as the body fills with blood; when they are full, they simply drop off. Ticks are most common in spring and summer in areas of woodland and grassland where sheep and deer graze. However, they can also be found in parks and gardens where there is a lot of wildlife. Because ticks can transmit diseases from one host to another, you should check your dog (and yourself) after every walk in these areas. If you find a tick, it needs to be immediately but carefully removed with a special tool called a tick twister. Never be tempted to burn the tick, smother it with creams, Vaseline, surgical spirit etc. and never try to squeeze or pull it off. These methods can make the tick regurgitate blood back into your dog and potentially increase the risk of passing on disease. To check for a tick, look carefully at the skin as you run your hands all over your dog's body, a tick will feel like a small lump or bump. They usually attach themselves to the ears, head, neck and feet so pay particular attention to these areas. You can find tick removal tools in many pet shops and below is a link to just one of the online sources.

<http://www.ticktwister.co.uk/shop/>

If you are treating your dog for both worms and fleas, please do not use these products at the same time. These products put a stress on your dog's system so try to leave at least one week between each one.

For the same reason, it is also important not to have your dog vaccinated within a week or two of using chemical flea treatment or worming products.

If you suspect your dog has worms or you know it has fleas, you will need to get rid of these parasites before your dog has any vaccinations. Vaccines are intended for use in healthy animals only.