

Bug Off

Protect your pet from these common pests.

By Debbie Swanson

Mosquitoes

Most are harmless, but some carry heartworm disease. Though dogs are more commonly affected, cats aren't immune.

→ **Symptoms** Heartworm signs include persistent coughing, trouble breathing and lethargy, says Lisa Maciorakowski, D.V.M., at Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston. Cats may also experience vomiting and weight loss.

→ **Prevention** Stop worms from forming with a vet-prescribed topical or oral formula, such as Heartgard or Interceptor. An injection is available for canines, but have your pet tested for heartworm first.

Ticks

These pests are most often carriers of Lyme disease, but other ailments, which vary by region, include Rocky Mountain spotted fever, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis and anaplasmosis. Deadly cytauxzoonosis, prevalent in bobcat-inhabited areas, threatens only cats.

→ **Symptoms** Joint pain, fever, fatigue and loss of appetite are most common. "However, 95% of dogs that test positive for Lyme don't show any signs," says Meryl Littman, V.M.D., associate professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. To be safe, have your animal screened at annual exams—cats too if they go outdoors.

→ **Prevention** "A repelling collar or topical solution should be worn year-round. And choose one that prevents the tick from attaching, rather than killing it afterward," says Littman. Perform daily checks: Examine the coat for pinhead-to sesame seed-size bugs, and feel around the skin for raisin-to grape-size bumps, which may be an engorged tick.

Bees and Wasps

After the initial sting, there will be lingering soreness. A pet is likely to have a more severe reaction if she has a run-in with a swarm or if she's allergic.

→ **Symptoms** "Give Benadryl [diphenhydramine] to ease any reactions," says Maciorakowski. The human variety is pet-friendly as long as it's not mixed with other ingredients (avoid multisymptom formulas); ask your vet for the proper dosage. Seek medical attention immediately if she vomits, has difficulty breathing or develops excessive swelling.

→ **Prevention** Routinely inspect your yard for hives, which should be removed by an exterminator. Plant flowery bushes away from play spaces.

Fleas

These blood-seekers set up camp on your pet, making him itchy. Some animals have an adverse reaction to the bug or its saliva, which causes scabs, redness, bumps and bald spots. The blood loss from severe



cases may trigger anemia.

→ **Symptoms** Relentless scratching and self-chewing—or excessive grooming in cats—are giveaways. Inspect fur and skin for small black bugs or tiny dark flecks, which are droppings.

→ **Prevention** Flea preventive products—such as collars and special combs—are your best bet. But if your pet still gets infested, ask your vet to recommend treatment, which may be a medicated shampoo or topical solution, such as Frontline. Home cleanup is also crucial; females lay up to 50 eggs per day, which scatter, hatch and repeat the cycle. Vacuum carpets, launder toys and bedding, and consider using an insecticide in your house and yard to ward off fleas.

→ **Read about people-specific natural remedies for avoiding and dealing with bites or stings on page 82.**

Claws Down

That innocent scratch from your kitten may not be so harmless if she's infected with the bacterium *Bartonella henselae*, which causes cat scratch disease (CSD), also known as cat scratch fever.

Anyone is susceptible, but it's most common in kids, who are more likely to get a swat, says Amy Guiot, M.D., instructor of clinical pediatrics at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. A bite or scratch is the likely route for CSD, but it can be transmitted by infected saliva coming in contact with eyes or an open wound. Symptoms include a bump at the abrasion site, swollen lymph nodes in the neck or underarm, fatigue, headache and fever. If you think someone in your family has CSD, speak with your doctor, since antibiotics may be needed.

FC TIP

Never share a tick or mosquito preventive among your animals. A pet's weight, species, breed and lifestyle determine the type and dosage.