

TICK FEVER (Canine Ehrlichiosis)

What is Tick Fever?

Tick fever, (formally known as Ehrlichiosis), can be considered a blood disease of dogs. The disease is carried by the Brown Dog Tick, which is abundant in our area. The infected tick transmits the disease when it bites the dog. Diagnosis is dependent almost entirely on blood tests to determine the number of blood cells present and to try to locate the organism.

Tick fever is not contagious to other pets or people.

Symptoms

This disease has three phases: acute, subclinical and chronic. In the acute phase, outward signs of illness are rather non-specific and may include listlessness, poor appetite, fever, joint pain, stiffness and discharges from the eyes and nose. Symptoms may appear 1-3 weeks after transmission and may last just a week or two. The subclinical stage shows no symptoms and may last for months.

The signs of the chronic phase may include those mentioned for the acute phase, plus nose bleeds or other abnormal bleeding, abnormal swelling of legs, and weight loss. In both phases the damage done to the body centers upon destruction and decreased production of all blood cells. This leads to anemia, decreased resistance to disease, infection and abnormal bleeding.

Treatment

If you notice any of the above symptoms, please take your dog to your veterinarian as soon as possible, as the chronic form of the disease is often fatal.

The acute phase of the disease is treatable, usually with good results in a short period of time (3-4 weeks with symptoms improving in just a few days). The chronic phase is more difficult to treat and can last for many months.

Treatment usually involves specific (low cost) antibiotics and in more severe cases may include other supportive care such as blood transfusions.

Prevention

The best prevention of the disease is to make all possible attempts to keep your dog free of ticks. This should include checking the skin thoroughly once a day, treating with tick dips or tick baths when necessary, and having your home and yard sprayed regularly to eliminate the presence of ticks.