

## Common Tick Species that Affect Dogs and Cats

They climb up blades of grass or weeds and wait patiently near the top to grab onto a host – sometimes traveling a foot or more while “stalking” their victims. Hard to believe the common tick could be so methodical, but these dangerous pests have their attack so planned out, it even has a special name – “questing.” So what common species of ticks should a conscientious pet guardian be on the lookout for? In general, the species most likely to prey upon dogs and/or cats are the deer, American dog, brown dog and lone star ticks.

### **Deer tick**

The deer, or black-legged tick, prefers to feed on deer, but will just as easily latch onto dogs, cats, and humans as suitable hosts. This reddish-brown tick is a mere 1/8- inch long, but is responsible for transmitting [dangerous infections including Lyme disease, babesiosis, and ehrlichiosis](#). Although vaccines exist to help prevent [Lyme disease in dogs](#), there is no such vaccine for cats, nor are there vaccines for the other diseases. So the best cure is prevention. Be especially attentive in areas where the deer tick is prevalent - along trails in wooded areas.

### **American dog tick**

Most prevalent in the southern US, and in coastal and other humid areas, the American dog tick, as the name suggests, preys on dogs and also humans. This tick species, also known as the wood tick, is the primary carrier of [Rocky Mountain spotted fever](#). A noteworthy characteristic of this tick is its chestnut brown color, offset by white flecks or streaks on its back. When engorged with blood, this species turns grayish and resembles a grape, small bean, or sometimes a skin growth on the affected pet. Female ticks can become so engorged that the length of their bodies can quadruple in size.

### **Brown dog tick**

The brown dog tick, found throughout most of the US, is another species that prefers to feed on dogs, and, in fact, rarely bites humans. The brown dog tick is also known as the house tick or kennel tick, hinting at the environment where this species thrives. This tick, in fact, can infest homes or other indoor environments where dogs are present, unlike other ticks that would eventually die off indoors. Look around a dog's ears and between their toes to find this reddish-brown, 1/8-inch long pest. Although the brown dog tick is not known for transmitting any diseases to humans, it is a carrier of the organisms that cause [ehrlichiosis](#) and other serious illnesses in dogs and cats.

### **Lone star tick**

The lone star tick, which feeds on cats, dogs, and humans, gets its name from the small white star that is present on the backs of females. These small brownish or tan ticks, often

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confused with the deer tick, can transmit ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and [STARI \(southern tick-associated rash illness\)](#). This species lives in wooded areas, especially along creeks and river bottoms, in the southern, central, southeastern, and east coast regions of the US, as well as Canada.

### **Tick-borne illness prevention and treatment**

Symptoms of tick-borne illness vary greatly depending on the specific disease, and whether the infected animal is a [cat](#) or a [dog](#). Often a pet will exhibit signs of illness without its guardian having ever found a tick, so diagnosis can be difficult. Although sophisticated veterinary testing can be conducted, and treatment can often be effective, the best “medicine” in warding off tick-borne illness is certainly prevention.

In general, avoid taking pets to locations where tick-infestations are high. In most places, tick season is more pronounced in warmer or wetter months, but this can vary greatly depending on the region and tick species. In addition, administer a year-round flea and tick preventative such as Advantix, Frontline, or other veterinarian-recommended medication. And, don't forget to examine pets immediately after outdoor activity, and [properly remove ticks](#) as soon as they're discovered. The longer ticks are allowed to feed on the host animal, the greater the chance for disease transmission. Just these few simple preventative steps can go a long way to keeping pets healthy, happy, and tick-free.