

Ehrlichia Canis



What is Ehrlichia?

Ehrlichia is a bacterial infection that is transmitted through tick bites and can cause high fevers, rash and bleeding disorders in several different species. Some strains of Ehrlichia have the potential to cause serious disease in people as well. Ehrlichia canis is the form of Ehrlichia typically seen in dogs.

Who in the family is at risk for Ehrlichia?

All warm-blooded animals, including humans, are at risk for developing the disease. Areas that are high in tick populations have a greater chance of coming into contact with the disease.

How is Ehrlichia canis transmitted?

Ehrlichia canis is not spread between dogs or from dogs to people, but must be carried by the tick. Ticks are parasites (an animal that lives upon or within another living creature to survive). The animal a parasite lives on is called the host. When a tick bites the host to feed, the Ehrlichia canis bacteria passes into the host's bloodstream. The length of time a tick must be attached in order to transmit the disease is still unknown. Ticks should be removed quickly though when located. The bacteria can also be transmitted during blood transfusions if the Ehrlichia canis bacteria are present.

How do I know if my pet is infected with Ehrlichia canis?

Initial signs of infection are nonspecific and may include fever, nasal and eye discharge, loss of appetite, depression, weight loss and enlarged lymph nodes. These initial symptoms usually resolve, although the disease is still present. If the pet's immune system is unable to clear the infection, the disease becomes chronic and symptoms may be ongoing and vary in severity as time progresses. The severe chronic form of the disease results in serious illness involving the nervous system or bone marrow. This can lead to serious complications and may even lead to the death of the pet. The disease in people causes flu-like symptoms including fever, headache and lethargy. In rare cases, humans have died from the disease as well.

How is Ehrlichia canis diagnosed and treated?

The good news is that Ehrlichia canis is easily diagnosed in dogs with an in-house blood test called 3DX. Results are available in just minutes. Banfield recommends that all dogs receive a 3DX test annually which also detects two other important diseases, Lyme and heartworm disease. Ehrlichia canis is also treatable. In most cases, antibiotics and supportive care can clear up the infection. In more advanced cases, hospitalization, fluid therapy and additional services may be needed depending on what body systems the disease infects. These treatments may need to continue for the rest of the pet's life.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.

What can you do to protect the entire family from Ehrlichia canis?

Staying clear of Ehrlichia canis means steering clear of ticks. Make sure your dog is on a monthly flea/tick preventative. Please note that most products that offer tick prevention are toxic to cats due a key ingredient, permethrin. Only products specifically approved for flea and tick control in cats should be used to avoid the possibility of toxicity. Do not attempt to hold, feed or entice wild animals into the yard, as they are frequent carriers of ticks. If possible, keep all dogs under leash control when outside and keep cats indoors. Ticks abound in areas of tall grass and brush. Avoiding these areas on your walks and hikes will reduce the probability of exposure. On your human family, use insect repellents and wear light-colored clothing when you go outside so ticks are easily seen. Wear long pants, long-sleeved shirts, socks and a hat in areas of potential tick activity; walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.

After your outdoor walks, treat your furry companion to a thorough tick check. Ticks like to be concealed so make sure to look in folds of skin around your pet's legs, under your pet's collar and in and around her ears. Remember to check yourself too.

You've found a tick... now what?

Ticks can be removed at home, but if you have any concerns, or the area looks aggravated or infected, bring your pet in for an exam. Your Banfield team is also happy to remove ticks for you.

Follow these steps for removing ticks:

- Use forceps or tweezers, not your fingers, to remove ticks.
- Grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible, pulling back gently but firmly. Try not to crush the tick's body. A piece of dried skin will usually come away as well.
- Wash the affected area with soap and water.
- Consult your Banfield doctor if a pustule or rash develops at the site of the bite after several days, or your pet's behavior changes.

Note: Never burn or use topical ointments or solutions to "back a tick out." These methods are ineffective and can harm your pet.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about your pet's health, contact your Banfield hospital.

