

## Is Your Dog a Tick's Best Friend?

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Homeowners on Guam who are also dog owners know all too well about the notorious brown dog tick. The brown dog tick, which is probably the most common tick in the world, can on rare occasions attack humans, but its preferred host is “man’s best friend” – the dog. This external parasite of dogs can become a serious pest if it is not properly controlled.

Before feeding, both the male and female adult brown dog ticks are about 1/8” long and dark red-brown. After a blood meal, the female may double or triple in size and become a dark blue-gray color because of her blood-stretched body. The adult female may suck up to 0.3 ml of blood per day. The adult female needs a blood meal for nourishment and for the development of her eggs. The male hardly expands.

The dog tick feeds by injecting its mouthparts into the skin of the dog. After feeding and mating on the dog, the adult female will leave the dog and search for a place to lay her eggs. Female ticks will usually place their eggs in cracks and crevices either inside or outside the house and near places routinely visited by the dog.

The female can lay up to 5,000 eggs in one mass and then dies. When the eggs hatch in 3-12 weeks, the young developing ticks will climb on outside vegetation, inside walls, or furniture to search for a dog to feed on. If they



do not find a host, they can easily wait for more than six months without having to feed. When a host is found, these young six-legged ticks will feed and spend one week sucking blood from the dog; they then drop off and molt into eight-legged youths in one to two weeks.

These eight-legged developing ticks search once again for a dog to feed on for another week, drop off, seek shelter and molt into an adult in two to four weeks. An adult tick will seek out a dog and feed for two to six weeks. Once the adult female tick mates, the cycle starts all over again. An adult tick can survive for two years without feeding if a host cannot be found. Homes and yards can be infested by the visit of a dog that drops mated female ticks. Other dogs can become infested when they are taken to an infested kennel or a home where ticks have successfully attached themselves to the dog.

It is difficult to totally isolate one’s dog from other dogs on Guam. To inspect every dog that enters one’s property for ticks is nearly impossible. The key to reducing tick infestation in dogs is early detection. Look especially behind the ears, neck, and between the toes. If a tick is found, pull it straight out with a pair of tweezers close to the skin of the animal. Kill the tick by drowning it in soapy water or flushing it down the toilet.

In addition, look for ticks in rooms where dogs sleep, under rugs and furniture, and in cracks and crevices around baseboards, tile, and cabinets. Vacuuming the dog's sleeping areas will also help reduce tick numbers. If inspecting for ticks outside the house, look for ticks climbing on the exterior walls of the house and in plant beds where the dog sleeps or rests.

Dogs are treatable by using pesticide dips, washes, or dusts, although most of these store-bought products do not last more than a few days. Local veterinarians may carry pesticide products, which are more effective than what can be purchased from local supermarkets or hardware stores. Veterinarians may also carry pills to feed dogs if tick infestation is severe.

When using insecticides to treat the inside or outside a home, read the label carefully. Follow all instructions on where and where not to spray. There are many different active ingredients found in the market place to control ticks. However, in cases of heavy infestations, it is recommended to consult a pest control professional who is authorized to use stronger chemicals than what may be available over the counter. More than one treatment may be required, depending on the severity of infestation.

A clean pet and a clean environment is the best one can provide for dogs and pets. Just remember that ticks are true survivors and they are just waiting for the chance to jump onto dogs for their next feeding. Tick control on Guam and in Micronesia is a continuous process that requires vigilance. The key is simultaneous treatment of the dog and its immediate environment.

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