

## Lyme Disease Digs Its Claws into Cats Too

*By Richard Johnston, President, Connecticut Humane Society*

People often think about Lyme Disease as a threat to humans. They may also worry about their dogs, since finding a tick on a pet canine happens all too often and dogs, by necessity, go for walks outdoors. What may surprise many pet owners, however, is that Lyme Disease is a threat for cats as well.

Lyme Disease can be transmitted to many species of mammals when an infected deer tick bites a host. Deer ticks are tiny, about the size of the head of a pin. This means they can easily hide unnoticed in a cat's fur, particularly since tiny deer ticks are difficult to see, even on bare skin, never mind on a furry feline.

More noticeable, however, are the signs that a cat has Lyme Disease. It is a disease that can cripple its victims, both humans and companion animals. Common symptoms associated with this disease, named for the eastern Connecticut community in which it was first identified, are fever, aches, joint pain and fatigue. In humans, the early signs of Lyme Disease may be confused with flu symptoms. It may produce a bull's-eye shaped rash. Left untreated, Lyme Disease can cause neurological side effects, blurred vision and motor control difficulties.

Detecting Lyme Disease in a cat can be more difficult than in humans, since they cannot describe how they are feeling, but there are signs to watch for. Common symptoms in cats include: lying in one spot with little movement for days at a time; being unwilling to get up and move around or crying when moving, and in particular, when picked up; being hesitant about jumping or climbing stairs; limping or seeming unwilling to allow a limb to bear weight; approaching the food dish as if hungry, but stopping after a bite or two.

A cat who displays these symptoms may be suffering from Lyme Disease and requires a veterinary examination for an accurate diagnosis.

As with people, the best method of dealing with Lyme Disease is prevention. Cats kept indoors are far less likely to contract Lyme Disease, but even they are not immune. It is possible for deer ticks to enter the home on clothing or a dog's fur. To help protect indoor cats, they should wear a flea and tick collar or be treated with a tick repellent available through a veterinarian. It is important, however, to use a repellent made for cats, since those intended for dogs may be far too strong and as a result harmful to felines.

If despite these efforts you suspect your cat may have Lyme Disease, seek veterinary care at once. Early treatment involves antibiotics, but only your pet's veterinarian can determine the right course of treatment for a particular case.

For more information on protecting your cat against Lyme Disease, contact your family veterinarian.