

K9 Health Information

CANINE LICE

What, dogs get lice?

YES, dogs can get lice, however, not to worry, canine lice are different than the type that humans get and are much easier to treat. Dog lice are species specific so you, your kids, and your cats cannot get lice from your dog. Unlike human lice, dog lice are almost motionless. They are flat, gray, wingless parasites that are about a twelfth of an inch long.

Canine lice are very common in Alberta, especially during the winter and spring months though, due to our increased heat & humidity, lice can be found all year round. Recent years have been especially 'good' years for lice, with some veterinarians reporting up to a 300% increase in the number of lice cases seen at their clinics. Contracting this parasite is in no way a reflection of how your dog is cared for or that they are dirty. It only means that they have come in contact with another dog that has lice.



There are two species of canine lice.

1. Biting (Mallophaga), *trichodectus canus* & *Heterodoxus spiniger*. (feed on kin flakes and skin)
2. Sucking *linognathus piliferus setosus* (feed on dogs blood and are more irritating)

How do dogs contract lice?

Unlike fleas and ticks, dog lice are very slow movers. In fact, they hardly move at all. They do not jump from dog to dog like fleas. Dog lice are spread through dog-to-dog contact, so if your dog interacts with other dogs on the trail, at the dog park, at your friend's house or in dog day care, your dog may be exposed.

Lice lay eggs (termed nits) on the hair shafts. The life cycle takes about 21 days to complete. Females lay up to 100 eggs or nits. The nits of the canine biting louse are protected by an operculum and are cemented to the base of the dog's hairs.

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How can I tell if my dog has lice?

If your dog has been scratching himself more than normal it could be due to lice. If you notice excessive scratching, your dog is having difficulty sleeping or is unusually irritable. Lice are very small, but can usually be seen by the human eye. They look like little black dots and have a clear lining around them. They do not really look like bugs, but more like dirt. It is very easy to see the lice if your dog is infested, but many pet owners miss them especially in cases where dogs only have a few lice on them and they can be very hard to find. They attach themselves to the skin, so you have to push the fur around to look for them. Groomers are often the ones to discover the lice when using a high-powered blow dryer, so it is good to schedule a time to have your dog checked.

What can I do to prevent lice?

Have your dog professionally groomed regularly. It's always good to have another set of eyes check over your dog. If your groomers find anything unusual, they will notify you. You can also talk to your vet about preventive treatments such as Advantix, Advantage, or Revolution. It is recommended that you put your dog on one of these preventive regimens if you are bringing your dog to a doggy-day care. There are some natural alternatives such as supplementing with garlic and vitamin B, but the stronger monthly treatments available from your vet are best.

What is the typical treatment for lice?

Of all parasites, lice are by far the easiest to treat because they are not active in our environment like fleas and ticks.

1. You can bathe your dog in a pyrethrin-based shampoo at seven-day intervals. If you have a young puppy that is infected with lice, consult your vet first before starting on any kind of pesticide treatment or other type of medication. Especially with Toy puppies, they do not tolerate flea baths.
2. Contact your vet about using Advantix, Advantage, or Revolution as a preventative measure and if your dog has visible lice. It is recommended that you repeat 2 weeks later.
3. For pregnant dams, and puppies over 6 weeks old, Revolution is one of the most recommended preventatives, but always consults your vet first.

When can my dog come back to daycare?

Please allow at least 14 days after the initial treatment before coming back to the daycare.

