Although it feels like spring keeps tempting us and then disappearing, it’s just around the corner...for real this time! With spring comes warm weather, more outside time and of course, parasites. In this news letter we will touch on fleas, ticks and heartworm. You will learn who is at risk, where and when they are found and how to treat and prevent these nasty critters.

***Wellness Plans***

*Looking for an easy way to budget for your pet’s medical expenses? Check out our wellness plans that offer all of your pet’s vaccines, unlimited wellness exams and many other awesome services and discounts!*

*Puppy & Kitten Spay/Neuter Plans:*

* *Three rounds of vaccines*
* *Deworming and Fecal Test*
* *Spay/Neuter surgery including pain medication and pre-anesthetic bloodwork*
* *Microchip*

*Feline/Canine Adult Wellness Plan:*

* *Annual Exam and vaccines*
* *Adult Wellness bloodwork with viral testing(For Dogs heartworm testing)*
* *10% off heartworm prevention*
* *Fecal test and dewormer*

*Feline/Canine Senior Wellness Plan:*

* *Annual Exam and vaccines*
* *Senior Wellness bloodwork with heartworm testing*
* *10% off heartworm prevention*
* *Urinalysis, Fecal test and dewormer*

*\*Dental Cleaning can be added to either adult or senior plan at an additional cost.*

**Fleas**

First we will start with fleas. Is your pet at risk? No matter what your pet’s lifestyle is the answer is always yes. Fleas are happy living just about anywhere, from in your yard to in your home. Fleas living outside feed on wild animals like squirrels, racoons and rabbits and can hop over 30cm from another host animal to the soil outside and then onto your cat or dog. As long as the weather is consistently above 13°C fleas are hopping around looking for their next snack. Have a cat or dog that doesn’t go outside? Unfortunately that doesn’t prevent fleas from finding them. Fleas are happy to catch a ride into your home on shoes and clothing. Although fleas don’t feed on people, it won’t take them long to find an area in your home such as the dog’s bed or the spot on the couch where your cat likes to curl up to start to feed on pet dander. As soon as they are able, they will jump on to feed and reproduce – a female flea can produce up to 50 eggs a day! That said it is estimated in a household with fleas, 95% live in the environment and on 5% of the population are actually on your pet. So how do you stop these critters from making themselves at home on your pets and in your home? There are many preventative medications available for flea prevention, and the best part is they work as a treatment as well. There are both topical and oral flea medications available, based on your pet’s lifestyle and health. Some help to kill larvae and assist in environmental treatment, others kill fleas before they bite and are great for pets with flea allergies. A flea’s lifecycle is roughly 3 months, so in order to ensure complete treatment, no matter what the medication; a pet needs to be treated for a minimum of 3 consecutive months. Please ask your veterinarian what medication would be best for you and your furry friend. If your pet already has fleas, some things you can do to help clean the environment are; wash and dry all bedding that your pet sleeps on and vacuum the entire home thoroughly

**Ticks**

With the rise in Lyme disease here in Ontario people are becoming more and more aware of the prevalence of ticks. Unfortunately as your pet is frolicking through the long grass or leaf litter it is becoming the perfect target for a questing tick. Ticks are very hardy critters and statistically only need the weather to be above 4°C to start looking for a host. However, in recent years it has been noted that Deer Ticks (most common host for Lyme Disease) can be active in weather as low as 0°C so long as it is a sunny day. Once one your pet has acquired a tick it will attach itself by burying its head and begin to feed, usually for a few days before dropping off. If you find a tick on your pet, do not pull! Gently rotate the tick’s head with a pair of tweezers or a Tick Twister® until you feel the mouth parts release and then remove the tick. Your veterinarian is able to submit ticks for analysis to determine type and if it is carrying disease. If you find a tick on your pet it is recommended to test for tick-borne diseases 4-6 weeks later. These diseases include Lyme disease, Anaplasmosis and Erlichia and can cause severe illness in your pets. Even if your pet spends most of its time indoors they are able to pick up ticks even from your back yard. Just think wherever wildlife frequents: so do ticks.

**Heartworm**

What is heartworm and is my pet really at risk? These are the most common questions when it comes to preventing this nasty parasite. Heartworm is a parasitic worm transmitted by mosquitoes, and yes, if you have a pet it is at risk. Unfortunately mosquitoes don’t stop at doors and windows and are happy to hitchhike into your home. This means even if your pet never goes out doors they could still be at risk. Cats and dogs become infected when the mosquito injects the heartworm larvae into its new ‘host’. From there it takes 7 months to develop into an adult worm, at which point a heartworm test would detect if your pet is positive. Should these worms go undetected, they can live for years in your pet’s heart and can reach lengths of up to 12 inches all the while damaging their heart and lungs. Once your pet begins to show clinical symptoms like coughing and exercise intolerance, the worm burden has become significant and treatment will likely be quite costly and dangerous. Although the occurrence of positive heartworm tests in Ontario is relatively low, there has been an increase in dogs being rescued from the southern states, many of which have had or are currently heartworm positive, and we can’t forget about foxes and coyotes that carry heartworm. Luckily heartworm preventative medication, when paired with annual testing, can work to ensure your pet never gets to that point. Preventative medication is either topical or oral and given once a month during times of risk (usually May – November here in southern Ontario) and with a negative heartworm test is low risk. If you have further questions about heartworm testing and preventative medication your veterinarian would be happy to discuss them with you!