

## **The risk of a tick bite for pet owners**

**Tuesday, August 08, 2017**

<http://danielcameronmd.com/risk-tick-bite-pet-owners/>

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Out of the 1,546 homes with pets, 88.1% used some form of tick control on their pets. Yet, 20% still found ticks on their pets, 31.4% reported ticks crawling on household members, and 19.2% found ticks attached to household members during the study period, [according to Jones from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Baltimore, MD.](#) [1]

Overall, pet-owning households reportedly had a 1.83 times greater risk of finding ticks crawling on household members and a 1.49 times greater risk of having ticks attached to a member.

But for those households that found ticks on their pets, the risk of a human tick encounter was increased significantly, with a 2.69 times greater risk of a tick crawling on a household member and a 2.5 greater risk of a tick attachment. [1] “We were surprised,” says Jones, “to find that the reported use of tick control on pets did not have a protective effect on tick encounters.”

The authors also found that certain property features increased the likelihood of human tick encounters. Homes with a vegetable garden, compost pile, log pile, bird feeder, stone walls and children’s play equipment were at a greater risk of “finding ticks both crawling and attached to household members.” [1]

There may be several reasons why the risk of tick exposure is greater for pet owners. The authors suggest:

1. Pets may bring ticks onto the property and even into the home where humans can encounter them.
2. Pet owners may engage in activities with their pets that take both themselves and their pets into tick habitat, increasing the risk of tick encounters for both the pet and the humans.
3. Pet ownership is increasing in the United States, and many pet owners allow their pets to share their living space, including beds and furniture.

This study did not demonstrate an association between tick encounters in pet-owning households and tick-borne diseases. However, another analysis found “self-reported tick encounters may be a robust surrogate for disease risk at the household level.” And therefore, “we believe the greater risk of encountering ticks in pet-owning households reflects a true increase in risk of tick-borne disease in these households,” states Jones and colleagues.

Pet owners should be made aware of these risks and reminded to conduct tick checks regularly on pets and household members and to consult their veterinarian regarding effective tick control products.

References:

1. Jones EH, Hinckley AF, Hook SA, et al. Pet ownership increases human risk of encountering ticks. Zoonoses Public Health. 2017.

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