



# Preventing and Responding to Ticks and Tick Bites on Your Horse

To keep your horse healthy, it's important to **stop ticks from biting them**. The best way to do this is by using several different methods of prevention and control together.

## How to Prevent Tick Bites:

- **Environmental Management:**
  - **Reduce Tick Habitat:** Mow grass short, cut back plants, and clear away leaves around where your horse grazes and on trails. Ticks like humid places, so doing this makes it harder for them to live there.
  - **Move Fence Lines:** If you can, **move fences at least 3 meters (9 feet) away from wooded areas**. This makes it harder for ticks to get to your horse.
  - **Wildlife Exclusion:** Stop large wild animals, especially deer, from entering pastures by using **tall (1.8-2.4 m) or electric fences**. Remember, smaller animals also carry ticks and won't be stopped by fences, so rodent control is also important.
- **Tick Checks:**
  - **Daily Checks:** Do **thorough tick checks every day**, especially in spring, summer, and autumn, and after riding in wooded or grassy places. Checking your horse often greatly **reduces the chance of them getting a disease from a tick, such as Lyme disease**.
  - **Focus on Protected Areas:** Look closely in specific areas: **under the jaw, under the mane, around the ears and eyes, on the underside of the neck and chest, belly, behind the elbow, in the groin area, and near the tail**. For spinose ear ticks, **check inside the ears**; if your horse shakes its head a lot, it might have them. Feel for small bumps. **Clipping longer winter hairs** where ticks often attach can help you spot them. Different ticks prefer different spots; for example, black-legged ticks often attach to the chest, while lone star ticks like the groin area. Winter ticks prefer the chest and back, often on the left side.



- **Tick Control Products (Acaricides) registered for horses in Canada:**
  - Appropriate pesticides that are active against ticks can be acquired through your veterinarian<sup>1</sup>. **Always read and follow the instructions on the label** very carefully to use them safely and effectively. Pay particular attention to the amount, location, and frequency of application.
  - **Important: Always use acaricides on animals they are approved for.** Products not made for use on horses can be dangerous. **Amitraz is poisonous to horses and must not be used.** Also, some products approved for use on horses are toxic to other domestic animals, for example, Permethrin products are highly toxic to cats. Always **ask your vet** which products are safe and right for your horse.
- **Treated Fly Sheets and Boots: Fly sheets and boots treated with permethrin** can help control biting insects and might offer some protection against ticks. We don't have many specific studies on how well they work for ticks on horses. Their effectiveness can lessen with washing and exposure to the environment. Make sure any fabric treatments are **specifically labelled for horses** to prevent skin problems.
- **Avoidance: Try to avoid grazing or riding your horse in areas with lots of trees or thick brush**, especially when ticks are most active.
- **Vaccines for Tick-Borne Diseases in Canada:** Right now, there are **no vaccines officially approved for horses in Canada** to prevent Lyme disease or anaplasmosis.

### How to Deal with Tick Bites:

- **Removing Ticks:**
  - Use the **right tools**: fine-tipped tweezers or a special tick removal tool like a Tick Key or Tick Nipper.
  - **Grasp the tick as close to your horse's skin as you can.**
  - **Pull the tick straight out with a firm, slow, and steady motion. Do not jerk or twist it**, as this can leave parts of the tick's mouth in the skin.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance on prescribing and dispensing of pest control products by veterinarians:  
<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/media/0r3heets/prescribing-and-dispensing-of-pest-control-products-by-veterinarians.pdf>



- **Do not crush the tick or use irritants** like petroleum jelly, burning it, using ice, or pinching it. These methods can make the tick release harmful, infected fluids back into your horse.
- **If the tick's mouthparts are left behind**, try to gently remove them with clean tweezers. **Don't dig at the skin.** If it's hard to remove them, just clean the area.
- **Getting Rid of the Tick:** After you remove the tick, **put it in a sealed container with rubbing alcohol or hand sanitizer, or freeze it at -20°C for two weeks.**
- **Submit Photos:** Take photos of the tick and send them to eTick. This program helps identify ticks and shows where they were found. You can find more information at <https://www.etick.ca/>
- **Clean the Bite Area:** Clean where the tick was attached with a mild antiseptic solution.
- **Watch Your Horse Closely:** For several weeks after a tick bite, **look for any signs of illness** in your horse. These signs include **fever, not wanting to eat, depression, swollen legs, small red or purple spots, yellowish gums or eyes, unsteadiness or trouble moving, or not wanting to move.** If you are worried, **contact your veterinarian.**
- **Talk to Your Vet:** If you find **many ticks on your horse**, or if you're worried about your horse getting a tick-borne disease, **talk to your veterinarian.** They can give you specific advice, tell you about local disease risks, suggest ways to manage the situation, and recommend tests. **Stopping tick bites in the first place is most important.** For diseases like anaplasmosis, getting an early diagnosis and starting antibiotics quickly works best.

By knowing the dangers of ticks and taking the right steps to prevent and respond to them, you can help keep your horse healthy.

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