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## **Lyme disease in dogs as difficult to diagnose as it is in humans — maybe more so**

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Doug Smith's story on Page 1 of the Star Tribune today points up the many threats that Lyme disease poses to people. Also, as is commonly known, this disease — which in its advanced stages can be debilitating — is difficult to diagnose.

My experience is that dogs suffer equally in the face of this tick-borne disease, and perhaps more so, given that they are lower to the ground, and that their owners often fail to provide protection for them in the form of sprays or other repellents.

Most important is to understand that if you're a grouse hunter in Minnesota, the chance that your dog will not come in contact with deer ticks is almost non-existent. The only question is whether, in the course of a season, the dog will be bitten by a tick that potentially can cause Lyme disease, and whether, separately, the dog will be afflicted.

My opinion is that many people and many dogs are bitten by ticks that can cause the disease, but that not all humans and dogs come down with Lyme.

Medical experts may disagree, but that's my experience. For example, I've been bitten by scores of deer ticks, and have never had Lyme. Similarly, I've taken lots and lots of ticks off dogs that never have been afflicted. Whereas others have.

Here's advice I follow: If your dog shows any unusual symptoms, especially if they concern lameness or an inability to get up or move easily, take the dog to the vet — but suspect Lyme disease.

It's possible Lyme isn't the cause. But it's possible — even likely — it is. Where things get troublesome is when a vet can't find what's wrong with a dog, and the dog seemingly gets better for a time. Or perhaps a right rear leg was bad first, then the dog was OK, then the lameness comes to the left front.

In these and similar cases, suspect Lyme first and foremost.

And insist that your vet start your dog on a course of the proper antibiotics. If the problem isn't Lyme, there will be no harm done by the prescription. If it is, you'll see an improvement fairly quickly, usually within two or three days.

I know quite a few people who have spent thousands of dollars on their dogs trying to beat Lyme after it has set in. You can prevent this, in most cases, if you are attentive to your dog, and if you remember to think "Lyme" when a mystery ailment strikes.

And remember, also, to insist that your vet begin antibiotics immediately, regardless of his or her hesitation or reluctance to do so.

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