

Hi! Dr. Oakley says....

Long winters kill vegetation, mammals, and moods...but not ticks! Everyone was hopeful that this long winter would kill the ticks that plague New England's population with Lyme disease.

Unfortunately, the low temperatures and snow cover won't make a dent. The snow cover actually acts as insulation.

Some experts in Maine (and who else would really try this experiment besides them and Dr. Z) placed adult female deer ticks in a freezer at -2 degrees Fahrenheit, and the ticks died within 24 hours. The researchers were excited at the prospect of the cold killing the ticks...until part two came in. The second series of tests took place outdoors, under the snow; the ticks' natural environment. Not only did the ticks survive, they started moving after a few seconds warming up in the researcher's hand! Thomas Mather, from the University of Rhode Island's Center for Vector-borne Disease and TickEncounter Resource Center points out that "Underneath the snow, it's probably a mild 25-28 degrees, not anywhere near cold enough for death to result." According to his group, it only needs to be about 40 degrees for hibernating ticks to wake and become active. At this point, they are eager to seek a host. So they wait for their next meal to pass by as they sit in wait on grass and other vegetation. (Bangor daily news article 3-19-14)

After we get past the "ick!" factor, what can we do? Dr. Z says that this spring he has already seen several lyme positive animals and just as many dogs that were positive for anaplasmosis!

It's shaping up to be a bad tick season, so don't forget to get your Lyme vaccinations and get on board with your preventatives! Many pet owners only use flea and tick preventatives seasonally, so if you are one of them make sure that this season you get going on this right away! Two newer oral products offer a skin residue-free option! Don't delay; the ticks are out there just waiting for us!

Also, make sure that all of your pets are current with their rabies vaccines! State law reminds us that they are necessary for licensing in June. That's just around the corner and we have already seen rabies infected animals this year too! Just in Lebanon in the last few months, we have seen pets who have come in contact with a rabid skunk and another who met a rabid raccoon! Fortunately, these pets were current with their vaccinations so a booster was all they needed to stay safe. Rabies is out there, and it only slows down if we all stay on top of it! Let's keep our pet population safe!