# **Hillside Mythbusters: Prevention Edition**

by [Hillside Animal Hospital](https://www.hillsideanimalhospital.net/author/squidgital/) | Feb 11, 2022 | [Blog](https://www.hillsideanimalhospital.net/category/blog/)

Summer will be coming to an end soon and Fall will be right around the corner. Kids are going back to school, the leaves will begin to change color, and all things pumpkin will make their return (Pumpkin-spice kitty litter anyone?). This is a time to buy school supplies, put away the swim trunks and start thinking about taking your animals off their flea, tick, and heartworm prevention….or is it? Maybe they only spend time indoors so they don’t even need to be on prevention in the first place, right? This edition of Hillside Mythbusters will look at these and other myths that deal with your pet’s monthly preventatives.  
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**Myth:** I don’t need to keep my pets on prevention during the colder months.

**BUSTED:** Even during the winter months fleas and ticks can still lie dormant until one warm day arrives. This will often cause an infestation in your home if you have taken your pets off preventatives or they weren’t on any at all. In our area we often never see an extended period of cold weather that would get rid of fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes(which cause heartworms). So this means that they can still be present even throughout the winter.

**Myth:** My pet lives inside, so they don’t need to be on prevention.

**BUSTED:** Unfortunately, fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes are crafty creatures. There is a reason we label them as pests. Fleas can jump on you or your pet when they walk outside in a matter of seconds. Mosquitoes often will fly inside your house just from a door or window being opened. Also, no pet ever seems to totally live indoors, unless you are using puppy pads/litterboxes and have one of those nifty tubes that the bank uses to transport your pet around (Good luck getting that image out of your head!). Ticks will often attach to your clothes without you realizing it and can then latch onto your pet.

**Myth:** I don’t have any carpets, so fleas can’t live in my home.

**BUSTED:** Fleas are small, but their eggs are even smaller. You can think of flea eggs as grains of salt. Animals with fleas are like walking shakers of salt spreading flea eggs everywhere. These eggs will get into carpeting, furniture, or even the small cracks in between hardwood floors! A single female flea can lay 20 eggs a day and eggs typically develop between 2 days and 2 weeks. With the volume of eggs being laid and how quickly they develop, you can see how quickly an infestation can occur.

**Myth:** I never see any fleas, so there is no need to use prevention on my pets.

**BUSTED:** With fleas it is what you don’t see that is the problem. Flea eggs make up 50% of the entire flea population and ,as mentioned earlier, are the size of a grain of salt. They then hatch and become flea larvae. The larvae make up 35% of the flea population and are about 1/4 inch long. They eat the pre-digested blood of adult fleas, or “flea dirt” as it’s called. Another name for flea dirt is flea poop (gross, right!). In 5-20 days the larvae spin silken cocoons and go into the pupae stage. This stage makes up 10% of the flea population. In this stage fleas are well protected. Prevention generally won’t touch them and if environmental conditions aren’t right they can be protected for months up to years. This is commonly why people moving into a new home will experience a flea infestation. Flea pupae will lay dormant and emerge when they sense the body heat of pets or humans, the rise in carbon dioxide from breathing, and the vibration from the movement in the home. When they emerge they are hungry and will begin to bite anyone nearby! The last stage is the adult flea and this is the stage that owners often see the most. Adult fleas make up only 5% of the total flea population. This is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to fleas.

**Myth:** I don’t need Heartworm prevention since my pet has always tested negative.

**​BUSTED:** The importance of an annual heartworm test cannot be stressed enough! Heartworm disease causes permanent damage to the heart and surrounding vessels. Dogs have died from as few as one heartworm becoming stuck in the chambers of the heart. The valves are forced open and the heart cannot pump blood properly in the body. One veterinarian even conducted his own study by following up on a patient of his. The dog was treated for heartworms when he was 2 years old. He was a stray that was adopted and kept on heartworm prevention every 30 days after heartworm treatment. When the dog passed away at the age of 15 from natural causes, the veterinarian received permission from the owner to evaluate the heart to see what the long-term effects of heartworm disease were. What he found was very surprising. The veterinarian found evidence of worm pieces still in the heart and the surrounding vessels had a cobble-stone appearance (normally this area is smooth). Remember all of this is 12 years after treatment on a dog who faithfully received preventative every 30 days. This shows that treatment isn’t a simple matter and that preventative is a much easier option. Heartworm tests done annually will ensure that the preventative is working properly and that further damage can’t be done if a dog is heartworm positive. The tests we use in the clinic will also test for tick-borne diseases that owners can get as well.

Hopefully, this edition of Hillside Mythbusters has helped to clear up some myths surrounding the prevention of fleas, ticks, and heartworms. I also hope you have learned something along the way and can better understand the diseases and pests we are fighting every day with our patients and their owners. Finally, if there are any myths or topics you wish to learn about please let us know! Until next time enjoy the company of your furry friends and not the several thousand guests that want to make your home theirs!

– Matthew Lang R.V.T.