

# How to improve flea, tick, and heartworm prevention compliance

*About The Author*

4–5 minutes

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Successes in modern veterinary medicine create a level of complacency among today's clients. As an example, proactive parasite prevention products work so well that many pet-loving families from younger generations lack real-world experience with rampant flea infestations. Even those who've faced the reality of fleas, ticks, and heartworms and the illnesses they bring may not remember just how bad things get if not kept in check.

## **Common causes of noncompliance**

On top of complacency, people accidentally create compliance gaps because of the exhaustion and distractions of daily life. It's easy to put off making that appointment, calling in a refill, or placing that online order. People also likely think, "Well, another week won't matter. It'll be fine."

Budget stresses — especially among families experiencing long-term job loss during the pandemic — sometimes cause compliance gaps, where pets go for a month or several months without protection purely for financial reasons.

Inadequate reminder systems also contribute to low compliance. If veterinary practices don't reiterate the importance and timing of using key pet-care products, then people often assume they aren't necessary, or they don't understand the risk of taking a haphazard approach to parasite protection.

Issues with product literacy also crop up. These mischaracterizations and misunderstandings about what various

flea, tick, and heartworm products contain or how they work enter conversations among people who share their lives with dogs and cats. These conversations often feature inflammatory words like “poison.”

### **Pet health education for improving compliance**

Your practice can address complacency through pet health education in the exam room and through educational marketing, including social media posts, videos, and infographics.

- Remind people how quickly flea infestations take hold (40 to 50 eggs a day), how long it takes to get a home infestation under control (often three months), and how uncomfortable fleas make pets — especially those with known allergy issues
- Explain again the various diseases ticks cause, the medical impact of those illnesses on pets, and the timelines and cost of treatment
- Share the latest [heartworm disease incidence data](#) for your local area to reiterate the risk and be specific when explaining the timeline, costs, and challenges of heartworm treatments
- Continually promote options for never running out of flea, tick, or heartworm preventive products such as long-acting injectables, auto refill, and bulk order
- Include parasite preventive products in budget friendly, [annual wellness plans](#), which spread costs out through automated, affordable monthly payments

However, consider tackling product literacy issues and concerns more directly with individual veterinary clients. In most cases, simply sharing facts won't turn their thinking around. Instead, take a [curiosity approach](#) to conversations to find the real reasons, feelings, and values behind concerns about using these preventive products.

Avoid starting questions with the word why. Instead ask about their worries and feelings of being overwhelmed. Look for places people get stuck and brainstorm more doable solutions to those sticking points.

Use education and genuine curiosity to move some clients from occasional use of preventives to year-round compliance for better pet health. Be open to their replies so that people feel heard, rather than dismissed. Then, pivot to make a specific pet health recommendation such as this:

*"Thank you for sharing your concerns and feelings. I appreciate having these conversations so that we better understand each other. I recommend that you use flea, tick, and heartworm preventives all year for [insert pet's name]. Is that realistic and doable for you right now?"*