

The Virginia Department of Health vector-borne disease program (VDH-VBD) seeks to collaborate with companion animal veterinary practices to determine the prevalence of tick species of veterinary and medical importance in Virginia. This project will complement the VDH-VBD’s ongoing tick surveillance efforts to understand the distribution of several tick species in Virginia.

It is estimated that ticks transmit more than 75% of vector-borne diseases affecting people in the United States in the past decade (1,2), and many of these diseases also affect dogs and cats. Ticks commonly found in Virginia include Amblyomma americanum, Dermacentor variabilis, and Ixodes scapularis, and other ticks such as Rhipicephalus sanguineus and Amblyomma maculatum have also been identified.

The VDH VBD conducts active field surveillance to identify the tick species and their distributions in Virginia, which has enhanced our understanding of tick-borne disease risk and potential disease burden in people. Incorporating passive surveillance by screening companion animals would expand our knowledge as pets can indicate tick abundance and risk to humans in a particular area due to our shared lifestyles with pets (2,3,4,5,6,7).

The results of this project will provide helpful information for practitioners that could be used to educate clients and guide preventative care communication. The data from the project will be shared directly with the veterinary community and the public through the VDH tick website. Veterinary practices in semi-rural/suburban areas would be of particular interest to the project as they may see animals from a wider geographic footprint.

Practices interested in participating would be provided with communication tools to assist with client education about the project and, if the client chooses to participate, the expectations regarding the return of results and follow-up once the ticks are submitted. Specimens from each patient must be accompanied by a pre-made label provided by VDH that identifies the following:

- Animal species

- Collection date

- County of animal residence

- Record of travel in the last 14 days

Specimens will be placed in a test tube prefilled with alcohol, also provided by VDH. Multiple specimens from the same patient can be pooled into a single vial. Samples will be recovered monthly from each cooperating veterinary practice by a representative from the local health department. Tick identifications will be shared with participating members via a shareable spreadsheet. The VDH-VBD can also serve as a direct communication resource for clients with questions about tick-borne diseases or tick ecology (client-specific email listed below). Lastly, a tick collection map displaying the results by county will be updated bi-weekly and available online through our environmental epidemiology website:  <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-epidemiology/virginia-tick-survey/>

Client-specific email for tick questions should go to: va.ticksurvey@vdh.virginia.gov

Practices interested in participating should contact:

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Citations:

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