



# Superior Animal Hospital & Boarding Suites, Ltd.

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## **Positive Anaplasma phagocytophilum test**

What if your dog has tests positive for a tick-borne infection caused by the organism *Anaplasma phagocytophilum* (formerly known as *Ehrlichia equi*)? The disease is called anaplasmosis or Ehrlichiosis. Several species of ticks can transmit this infection, including the deer tick (which also transmits lyme disease) and the common wood tick.

Many dogs with this infection have no symptoms at all. Symptomatic dogs may have a fever, be off feed, be sore or lame, have a low platelet count (type of white blood cell), or other blood cell abnormality. Because we have so many ticks in our area, it is possible for a patient to be infected with other *Ehrlichia* species or *Borrelia* (Lyme disease organism) at the same time.

Once a dog has been infected, and even after treatment, antibodies to the organism may be present for a long time. Dogs may continue to be positive longer than a year after infection. Unfortunately these antibodies do not prevent reinfection with this organism. There also is no vaccine to help in the control of this disease.

Fortunately, the organism is relatively easily treated with a tetracycline antibiotic called doxycycline. Infections are generally treated for a minimum of 28 days. Dogs showing symptoms of infection generally respond and improve 1 to 4 days after starting treatment.

We have established the following protocol for managing patients testing positive for *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*:

1. **Complete Blood Count (CBC).** This test checks the number of white blood cells, platelets, and red blood cells. If it is normal, no follow-up would be necessary. If it is abnormal, other testing may be required, and the CBC will need to be rechecked after the antibiotic treatment.
2. **Doxycycline antibiotic.** This is the antibiotic of choice for treating Ehrlichia and Anaplasma infections; an initial prescription is administered for 28 days. The medicine is generally well-tolerated. Potential side effects are gastrointestinal and include vomiting, diarrhea, and/or inappetence. It is best to give this pill with food. Do not give pills with dairy products. If there are any side effects seen, you should call the doctor and usually an adjustment of the dose will correct the symptoms.
3. **Institute Effective Tick Control.** Applying Frontline Topspot monthly is the safest effective tick control.
4. **Retesting.** Next year's test will serve as the retest. Dogs may continue to test positive in spite of effective treatment.

Overall, it is important that we are able to detect this infection in your dog and institute an effective treatment. As research of tick-borne diseases continues, new information may become available to help manage these infections.