

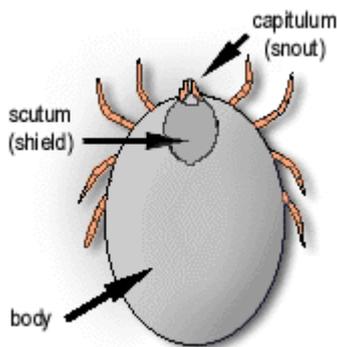
Tick season is now open for business



Ticks are blood sucking ectoparasites (a parasite that lives on the exterior of an animal). There are hundreds of species of ticks worldwide. Australia has around 70 species.

Paralysis ticks (*Ixodes holocyclus*) affect dogs and cats in Australia. They are common to this area and most active in warmer weather but we have had cases during the middle of winter so the season seems to be extending.

What do paralysis ticks look like?



Life Cycle of the Paralysis Tick

Ticks have 4 stages of life...

- 1) Egg
- 2) Larva (6 legged)
- 3) Nymph (8 legged)
- 4) Adult (8 legged)

What do Paralysis Ticks do?

The tick burrows its mouthparts into the skin. It sucks blood & injects a neurotoxin called Holocyclotoxin, which causes paralysis. It is usually the female tick who attaches to animals. The tick is fairly small when it attaches to its host, growing in size as it consumes more blood. Illness doesn't occur quickly, as it does with animals such as snakes & spiders, it can take

hours or even days before symptoms of poisoning become apparent.

What does Holocyclotoxin do?

Holocyclotoxin is excreted from the tick's salivary glands into the animal and damages or destroys cells of the central nervous system..

How do paralysis ticks get onto dogs and cats?

Stimuli such as heat & movement alert the tick to a potential host. They climb onto vegetation & when an animal passes, it waves its forelegs (known as questing) until it makes contact with the host.

Early signs of tick poisoning in dogs:

- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting or dry retching, excessive salivation, difficulty swallowing, difficulty breathing
- Change to bark
- Coughing
- Noisy panting
- Difficulty swallowing

Signs of tick poisoning in cats:

- Cats have the same signs and symptoms as dogs but some claim that a cat's pupils will be dilated and it may lose its ability to meow and this can show up days before more obvious symptoms become apparent. We have not noted this in the clinic as most cats are beyond this stage when brought to us

As symptoms progress you may also notice;

- Limb weakness, starting in the hind legs, progressing to the front legs, appearing wobbly & uncoordinated, falling over, paralysis
- Incontinence
- Laboured breathing
- Coma

What to do if your dog has been poisoned by a tick?

Keep yourself & your dog as calm as possible. Remove food & water as poisoning can prevent the dog from swallowing properly, which in turn could lead to choking. Take it to the veterinarian as soon as possible. The longer you delay taking your dog to a vet, the worse the symptoms will become, which may lead to death.

Removal of ticks:

It is recommended you wear a pair of latex gloves while removing a tick. Using tweezers or a tick remover, firmly grasp the tick's head as close to the dog's skin as possible. Be extremely careful not to squeeze the body of the tick as this will inject more poison & pathogens into the dog's system. You can also kill the tick while it's still on the dog by using an appropriate insecticide – Do not use Petrol, Methylated Spirits, Kerosene etc as these will harm the animal's skin and make little difference to the tick.

What products can you use to prevent ticks?

While there are many products that can assist, most have a very short effective lifespan and need replenishing frequently. A wash will only kill ticks actually on the dog at the time of the wash. Many spot on treatments need replacing at least every 2 weeks. Tick collars seem to be a good deterrent but need to be replenished frequently and kept dry. Overall, the best treatment is your vigilance.

Check your pet thoroughly every day starting from the tip of the nose & work your way right down to the tail. Take your time and check between the toes, in the armpits, inside the ears etc. Always remove all collars when checking.

While keeping your dog out of native bushland helps, ticks are often found in your own yard as native animals, who are mostly immune, may well pass through and drop off a few ticks for you.

What will the Vet do to treat your pet?

Treatment depends on the severity of the symptoms, and is different from case to case. The greater the severity, the more care the animal will need & mortality rate increases, which is why it's so important to seek veterinary care as soon as you suspect tick poisoning. Symptoms may also include pneumonia, high blood pressure, heart problems, vomiting & respiratory difficulties.

If it is having difficulty breathing, it may be given oxygen. It may also be put on a drip to prevent dehydration but your pet will almost certainly be hospitalised & given antiserum. This serum (the clear part of the blood which contains antibodies) is obtained from dogs that have been made hyperimmune via repeated exposure to paralysis ticks.

Recovery is dependent upon severity of symptoms but veterinary treatment will usually last at least 2 days and often longer with staff checking it every couple of hours even throughout the night. Once discharged, you will be required to care for your pet for some time to complete its recovery.

Do paralysis ticks affect other animals?

Yes, ticks affect native animals too. Including marsupials, reptiles, birds, dingos and wild dogs. The Bandicoot is a particular favourite and any of these can leave ticks at your place.

What to do?

Be vigilant, keep them out of long grass if possible and check your pet every day.

If in doubt – pick up the phone and call the Vet