

Tick Paralysis



Distribution

Paralysis ticks are found in bushy coastal areas of the eastern seaboard of Australia. In Victoria, the distribution of the paralysis tick is primarily in the east Gippsland region which extends from the east coast as far inland as Bairnsdale and Omeo. Paralysis ticks are found up the eastern coast of NSW and Qld. Ticks are most prevalent from spring to autumn, but can be encountered all year around. You cannot be too careful when it comes to paralysis ticks. Veterinary advice should be sought and any ticks that have been removed should be presented along with your pet for identification. Ticks can be removed by your veterinarian or by yourself, using tweezers at the level of the skin by grasping the head and mouthparts, whilst taking care not to twist or squeeze the body.

Clinical Signs

Clinical signs take on average 5-7 days to develop after attachment. The clinical signs are progressive and potentially fatal. The earlier treatment is started after symptoms arise, the better the outcome for your pet.

Paralysis ticks secrete a toxin in their saliva which has effects on neurological, cardiac and respiratory function in both pets and humans. The first sign generally seen is a staggering gait due to hind limb weakness. As the paralysis moves forward in the body it may cause signs such as:

- An inability to vocalize normally
- Coughing and gagging due to an inability to swallow
- Dilated pupils
- Regurgitation or vomiting
- Grunting on expiration
- Difficulty breathing
- Rapid breathing

Prevention

Prevention is the best cure and there are simple steps you can take to protect your pet from tick toxicity. Performing thorough daily tick searches on your pet is recommended if you live in, or plan to holiday in a tick prone area. Tick searches are made easier if your pet's coat is clipped short, especially during the tick season. Ticks commonly attach around the head so be sure to check in and around ears and under the collar and also thoroughly check the legs, between the toes and under the tail as part of your search. Continue to check your pet for ticks for 5-7 days when you leave a paralysis tick area. Products such as spot-on treatments, baths, rinses and collars are available and can be useful in preventing tick attachment but thorough searching remains vital as no product absolutely prevents ticks from attaching and causing paralysis. Talk to your regular veterinarian for more information about the products available to protect your pet.