

How can I protect my dog from tick paralysis?

The paralysis tick, *Ixodes holocyclus*, causes tick paralysis. Tick paralysis is a serious and potentially fatal condition requiring urgent veterinary attention.

It is important to be aware of paralysis ticks and to actively protect your dog.

What are paralysis ticks and how do they cause paralysis?

Paralysis ticks are dangerous parasites that can attach to the dog and proceed to suck blood from them. As they suck the blood, they secrete a toxin into the pet. This toxin affects the nervous system leading to a number of symptoms (see below) and potentially death.

Where are paralysis ticks found?

The paralysis tick is generally found on the eastern seaboard, from North Queensland down to Victoria. In the north, paralysis ticks may be found all year round, while in the more southern areas, the season generally begins in spring and finishes in late autumn. Please note that tick season can be variable, starting earlier and ending later, for example, it may start early if the winter is mild.

Ticks can also be found inland in suitable habitats. Paralysis ticks may be found on animals that live in or near bush or scrub land. Native animals such as marsupials, birds and reptiles are the natural hosts, however ticks can also become attached to animals such as dogs and cats.

How do I protect my pet?

A holistic approach is necessary to protect your pet and reduce the risk of tick paralysis.

1. Avoid the tick habitat

During the tick season, don't take your dog walking in bush areas or scrub areas known to harbor ticks. Keep lawns and shrubs short and remove compost material from backyards.

2. Search pets every day for ticks

The most essential preventative measure is a thorough search of your dog's skin and coat at least once a day even if tick control products have been applied. This method gives you the best chance of finding a tick.

What do paralysis ticks look like?

The paralysis tick can look different depending on whether they are engorged with blood or not. When engorged with blood they have a blueish to light-grey/grey colour. Familiarise yourself with their appearance - check at your local vet clinic/vet clinic website, they will usually have posters and photos of paralysis ticks.

Once on the animal, the tick finds a site of attachment where it becomes deeply and firmly embedded in the skin. When an adult tick feeds on blood, it increases in size dramatically (becomes engorged). When a tick attaches to the skin, the area becomes red and a raised thickening or "crater" may appear. A crater is evidence of a prior tick attachment.

How do I search my pet?

- Search pets thoroughly at least once a day, use the fingertips to feel through the animal's coat. Ticks or tick craters can be felt as lumps on the skin surface.

- Most ticks are found forward of the front legs, especially on the face, neck and ears . However, remember to search the entire pet.
- Start at your petâs nose and slowly examine the face, forehead and ears (outer and inner surface of the ear flap/pinna). Also search the eyes and lips and the skin/fur around the eyes and lips. Carefully examine all skin folds as well.
- Remove any collars and search the neck area thoroughly including the skin folds of the neck.
- Continue the search, searching the shoulder area and then down the shoulders to the front legs. Remember to check between each toe and under surface of the front feet. Also check under the armpits.
- Examine the chest area, all along the back, sides, belly, inguinal area, around the tail and anus and the thighs, back legs, in between the back leg toes and feet (including the under surface).

How do you remove a tick?

If a tick is found it should be removed immediately. Your veterinarian can show you the best way to remove a tick. When removing a tick, avoid disturbing the body of the tick (donât squeeze the body). Aim to remove the tick by its head (remove it at the head end of the tick, at the point of insertion into the pet's skin). A useful aid is a tick remover - a fork like device that slides either side of the tick without touching the body of the tick and removes the tick easily.

If you find a tick, remove it immediately and take your dog to the vet as soon as possible. Remember to also continue to search for more ticks. Some dogs can be infested with many ticks at one time.

3. Be aware of the symptoms of tick paralysis which may include:

- Loss of coordination in the hind legs (wobbliness in the back legs) or not being able to get up
- Weakness in the back legs
- A change in the sound of the bark or voice
- Retching, coughing (sometimes it is a moist cough), vomiting
- Excessive salivation/drooling
- Loss of appetite
- Progressive paralysis to include the forelegs
- Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing
- Grunting noises when breathing
- or any other abnormal behaviour or symptom

What should you do if your pet shows symptoms of tick toxicity or if you find a crater or a tick on your dog?

Take your pet to your veterinarian as soon as possible â tick paralysis is a serious and potentially fatal condition that requires veterinary attention.

Stay calm and keep your pet calm and at a comfortable temperature (not too hot or cold).

Search for ticks and remove them as soon as possible (see removal tips above).

Do not offer food or water or give anything orally, pets affected by tick paralysis cannot protect their airway when they swallow (as a result of the toxin) and this may lead to aspiration of food/water into their airways which can cause aspiration pneumonia and serious breathing difficulties.

4. Tick control products

How can I protect my dog from tick paralysis?

In addition to being aware of tick paralysis and the common symptoms, avoiding tick habitats and daily searching for ticks on your dog, talk to your vet about tick control products which are safe and suitable for dogs.

Important note: Never use any dog tick control products on cats as some dog products are highly toxic to cats and can kill cats.

If you have any questions about tick paralysis, talk to your veterinarian.

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Companion animals -> Dogs -> How can I protect my dog from tick paralysis?

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