

## Are there Paralysis Ticks in Summer Hill?

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The great answer is NO. (Not yet)

Summer Hill Village Vet does, however, see some cases of tick paralysis each year in pets that travel to the coast on holidays.

Visiting the outskirts of Sydney or travelling up or down the coast this summer? Please be aware of ticks. Generally the risk is higher in areas of natural bush along the coast (from Lakes Entrance Victoria to Cape York in Queensland). Although there are many types of ticks it is the Paralysis Tick we are concerned about. Bandicoots & other native animals are unaffected by these ticks but they will cause paralysis in most cats & dogs.

The tick *Ixodes holocyclus* occurs along the East Coast of Australia. The worse time is from August through February but you can find ticks all year round. Particularly when rain follows a period of warm weather.

As if that weren't bad enough, scientists suspect that a combination of global warming, recent weather patterns, overgrown gardens, composting and mulching as well as growing bandicoot numbers is contributing to a steady increase in tick populations. Compounding the problem are all those shady patches under overhanging branches in overgrown public recreational areas that prove so attractive to pets and their owners.

Ticks may be small, but they're prolific breeders. The female paralysis tick lays up to 3,000 eggs. After hatching, the larvae climb onto nearby vegetation and look for their first hosts. Normally, this would be a bandicoot or possum, which become immune to the poison. Once they have engorged the required amount of blood, the larvae drop to the ground, moult and turn into nymphs. Each nymph will then attach itself to a second host, do the blood-engorging thing again, hit the deck, moult to become an adult tick and find yet another host. After getting her fill of blood - often more than 100 times her own weight - the female paralysis tick is ready to abandon her final host and lay her eggs...to start the whole cycle all over again.

Paralysis ticks tend to be light blue to grey in colour, ranging in size from two or three millimetres to as large as 10 millimetres. But even the smallest can cause paralysis. If you don't have a ruler handy, think of it this way: any tick a quarter the size of your little fingernail can be dangerous, even deadly. Because these ticks tend to attach themselves securely to the skin, they can

be difficult to remove. When they are pulled out, they usually leave a noticeable crater in the animal's skin, which can last for several weeks.

Although most ticks are found around the head and neck of the animal, they can end up anywhere on the body. It is especially important to search longhaired dogs very thoroughly between the eyes and the end of the nose. The most reliable way to locate the ticks is to systematically run your fingers through your cat or dog's coat. Always assume there is more than one tick and continue your systematic search.

It is true that animals can develop an immunity to tick poison, but it requires repeated mild poisoning and may last only one season. And even those animals that do build up immunity can still wind up paralysed if multiple ticks or a particularly toxic one bites them.

The paralysis tick injects a toxin into its host dog or cat as it feeds. Normally, cats show more resistance to this poison than dogs, but if affected the signs are similar for both. Increased body temperature due to either hot weather or exercise will exacerbate symptoms.

The female attaches to the pet by burrowing their mouth into the skin and then they start sucking blood, injecting toxins at the same time. After a few days symptoms start: sometimes the first sign is a change in bark or miaow or you see your pet coughing when drinking. But the obvious signs are wobbly back legs and trouble breathing. These signs worsen and progress (starting at the back legs the paralysis progresses up the body) and the final results is often death even with treatment.

If left to run its course, a case of tick poisoning goes through three stages.

**Early signs:**

- A change in voice; the meow or bark becomes softer and/or changes pitch.
- Weakness in the back legs; walking along then sitting down suddenly is a common early sign, or trouble with stairs.
- Coughing when drinking or even vomiting, especially if it happens several times in a day and you see froth. (This is the most confusing sign as vomiting can be caused by MANY things!)

**Later signs:**

- Wobbliness in the back legs.
- Excessive salivation and vomiting is not uncommon. They lose the ability to swallow so
- fluid or food can go into the lungs.
- Panting, progressing to loud breathing, even grunting noises.

- Many dogs will exhibit a moist cough and breathing problems before other signs.

### **Worsening signs:**

- As signs of poisoning progress, the animals become unable to stand.
- Breathing becomes exaggerated and difficult.
- As breathing becomes more difficult, the gums become cold and blue-tinged. Death follows quite quickly.

### **What to do?**

Take the tick out! Using a tick hook is best but even if the head is left in it may cause local infection and irritation but don't worry too much as the tick will die and inject no more poison.

Even when you find a tick and remove it, your pet isn't out of the woods. There's a very good chance the tick could have left a residue of poison under the skin that will then be slowly absorbed. They usually start showing signs within the next 12 hours. You should keep an eye on them for the next two to four days, keeping them cool and calm while avoiding excitement and exercise. Also, do not offer your pet either food or water for 12 hours or until a Vet has checked them, because their ability to swallow may be impaired. If at any point the signs worsen, call us straightaway.

**Preventive measures** - While new, improved products are appearing quite regularly, the paralysis tick can become resistant to insecticides. Also, no product claims to be 100% effective. So even if you use a preventative, you should still search your pet *every* night during the tick season. These search-and-destroy missions become even more imperative after your animal has been in bushy terrain. A small tick missed one day is often found the next. Incidentally, tick control on dogs tends to be easier than on cats but, luckily for cats, they seem better able than dogs to remove attached ticks by grooming. Ask us for the most recent advice on prevention and when to apply it.

Check your pet EVERY DAY for ticks if you are in a high risk area. Use tick prevention measures (Bravecto chews, Nexgard chews or Advantix back-of-the-neck liquid for dogs, Frontline spray for cats). Take a Tick Hook with you for easy removal of ticks.

If you see a tick remove it right away & place in a bag to take to Vet with the pet. Symptoms can worsen for 12-24 hours after a tick is removed so don't assume all is well just because you found the tick. If you can't remove the tick go to the Vet – often people think they've found a tick when they haven't – so don't panic!