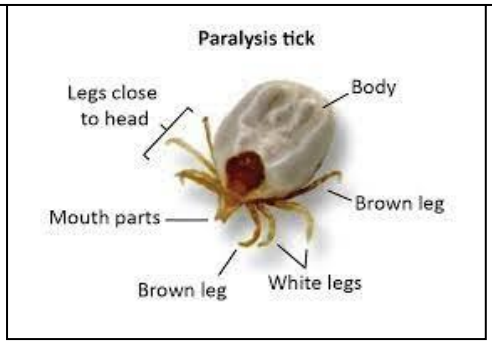
Tick Paralysis

Why is tick paralysis important?

Did you know that both dogs and cats can get tick paralysis?

Here at VetHQ we take tick paralysis very seriously. Over the last month, we have seen a case of tick paralysis at least weekly. All of these cases were from dogs living in the local area and all of these cases were dogs who were not on tick prevention. This week we even had a kitten with tick paralysis!



What is tick paralysis?

Tick paralysis is a potentially deadly condition that can affect dogs *and* cats. It is caused by the parasite *Ixodes Holocyclus*, the Paralysis Tick.

Paralysis ticks can be identified by their grey body and legs close to the head. Their legs are what best distinguishes them from other types of ticks. Ask a staff member to help you if you are unsure.

Key tip: if you remove a tick from your pet, keep it in an air-tight container to identify at your local vet. They can dispose of it.

The paralysis tick is usually found in bushy coastal areas along the eastern seaboard of Australia from north Queensland to Eastern Victoria. Ticks are most prevalent Spring to Autumn however can occur at any time of year.

Paralysis ticks will jump onto dogs or cats and then attach by burrowing their mouth parts into the skin. Although they can attach anywhere, they generally attach to the front half of the dog or cat.

After attaching, the tick feed's on the host's blood and injects small amounts of saliva into the pet during this process. It is the tick's saliva that contains a toxin that leads to the connection between the nerves and muscles through the body to become disrupted. This causes weakness and ultimately paralysis.

What are the signs of tick paralysis?

- Uncoordination
- Weakness leading to collapse
- Vomiting or retching

- Change of bark or meow
- Difficulty breathing

These are the most common signs but there are others too. Tick paralysis is progressive and potentially fatal. Some dogs and cats even require mechanical ventiliation.

What can I do to protect my dog?

These days there are excellent products available to protect your pet. The products we recommend are **bravecto, nexgard** or **simparica**.

If you are visiting a known tick area make sure your pet is protected with one of the above products, please ask our friendly staff to help you select the correct product for your pet ensuring it is for the right body weight, species and administered properly. ***That's the VetHQ difference…..we can tailor the product to your pet and your family, so you have peace of mind.***

Secondly, if you are in a tick area **make sure to check your pet** at least once daily for ticks. No product is 100% effective. I find the easiest way is to sit with your pet, ma finger tips through the hair on your pet to detect any tick. Work your fingers through the coat and down to the skin systematically through the entire coat. Make sure you check the edge of the lips, in skin folds, between toes and in the ears. **You may not see the tick but you will usually find it by feel** and try to focus on the front half of the pet around the head and neck. Having your pet's coat nice and short through the tick season helps with this.

What can I do to protect my cat?

The products we recommend are **Bravecto** and **Frontline.** Please do not ever use dog products on your cat as they can be extremely toxic to cats. **Daily tick searches** are also very important in cats that are visiting tick areas.

What do I do if I find a tick?

If you think you have found a tick, part the fur to have a closer look at it. Nipples, warts and other bumps on the skin are often mistaken for ticks.

If it is a tick please use a **tick remover** (tick hook) to detach it from the skin. Even once a paralysis tick has been removed it is possible for the pet to start showing signs of tick paralysis and can deteriorate due to the lingering toxin in their blood stream. If you are unable to safely remove the tick, please visit us and we can have one of our staff remove it for you.

If your pet is showing any clincial signs you should take them to the vet promptly for treatment. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you are not sure what to do.

At VetHQ, our vets have decades of experience in diagnosing and treating tick paralysis. Our veterinarians regularly attend conferences on tick paralysis to ensure our treatment protocols are most current and effective.

So why did the dogs in our local area get tick paralysis?

One of the most common scenarios I see as a vet is that the dog has visited a tick area as a day trip with their owner, not been on prevention and 2-3 days later has started to develop signs of tick paralysis.

A lot of people forget that a trip to Palm Beach or Jervis Bay, is not without risk to their pets.

Another scenario I saw last week, was most likely from a 'love of bush'. The dog stayed at home in Double Bay but the owner loves bush walking. She bush walks weekly in the region of the lower North Shore and loves to bring

Case Study

We had a young cat present to us with tick paralysis. The cat was living in the eastern suburbs BUT the owners had visited the northern beaches with their cat and unfortunately the cat came home with a tick! This is quite common as alot of people take their cats on holidays.

home some branches for home…….but unfortunately this may have been how the dog came in to contact with the paralysis tick.

Key Points

1/ Use a **tick preventative product** in your pet. They are very safe and affordable- and could save your pet's life, even if you are not taking them to a tick area. Ask our staff to help you with this.

2/ If you are visiting a tick area, please **check your pet daily** for ticks as no product is 100% effective.

3/ If you find a tick and you are not sure what to do please **contact us for assistance.** There may be more than one tick on your pet.

4/ Be mindful that if you are visiting a tick area, even without your pet, you may accidently bring home a tick in camping gear, on plants or on your body. Have your pet protected.

Dr Polina

Vet HQ Double Bay