

TICKS AND YOUR PET

PET CARE TIPS

What you need to know

Ticks can be found all year round although during 'tick season' (between the months of June and March) our South East Queensland weather provide them with the perfect environment to flourish, therefore pet owners need to be vigilant. This is especially so during the peak of tick season - between September and November.

Ticks are carried by native animals such as possums and bandicoots, so if you live near bushland, chances are, ticks will be abundant! And while they don't survive well in near salt water, they can be found in the nearby parks.

Your pet doesn't have to leave your house to get a tick. They can be picked up by you while gardening or walking to the letterbox and carried back into the home – therefore we recommend preventative treatments all year round.

What is a tick?

Ticks are a small wingless insect (around 3 - 5 mm long). There are many species of tick but the cause of most concern is the Paralysis tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*). While they're only tiny, they are actually one of the most dangerous parasites affecting domestic pets. The Paralysis tick can be found along the Eastern Coast of Australia. In this area, nearly all ticks found on dogs are paralysis ticks.

Once attached, the female paralysis tick (pictured) injects a toxin that causes paralysis. Most commonly weakness starts in the hindlegs, then progresses to total paralysis of all four legs. Once the muscles of the throat and chest become affected, serious problems with breathing and swallowing occur. The tick will continue to inject toxin until it is removed.



Death in untreated animals can follow in as little as 24 hours after symptoms commence.

How can I prevent my pet getting a tick?

Tick treatments such as Bravecto, Nexgard and Simparica provide excellent protection from ticks. Check your pet for ticks daily. When checking, feel for small lumps and make sure you look in 'hidden' places such as under the collar, between the toes, in the 'armpits', inside the lips, in skin folds and inside their ears.

Clipping your pet at the beginning of tick season will make daily searches much easier.

Clearing long grasses and removing leaves, grass clippings and other organic debris around your yard will to help reduce the prevalence of ticks.

You can also help prevent your cat from getting ticks by keeping them indoors.

What are the signs that my pet might have a tick?

Tick toxin is slow acting, however once signs of poisoning have begun, your pet may quickly deteriorate. Symptoms can be varied, depending on where the tick is attached. For example, if the tick is attached to the eyelid, you may

Symptoms can be varied, depending on where the tick is attached. For example, if the tick is attached to the eyelid, you may notice an inability to blink or fully open the eye before other symptoms appear.

Common symptoms are:

- An unsteady, staggering walk
- Difficulty getting up
- A dry cough, or even just a change in the animal's bark or meow.
- Panting, loud breathing, grunting noises
- Change in breathing pattern
- Vomiting or regurgitating food
- Difficulty swallowing
- Excessive drooling
- Lack of appetite
- Inability to blink
- Gums may be cold and blue-tinged

If your pet shows signs of tick paralysis and is not currently on a preventative, contact the Veterinary Surgery immediately, even if you can't find a tick.

[What should I do if my pet has a tick?](#)

Firstly, remove the tick. If you find a tick on your pet, it is best to remove it as quickly as possible. Use a tick removal hook or thread wrapped around the head end. Try not to squeeze the ticks' body - this can cause more toxins to be injected.

As paralysis ticks effect the respiratory system, keep your pet calm, quiet and stress-free. Don't offer food or water as this may lead to choking or pneumonia.

Take your pet to the Veterinarian immediately if they are displaying any paralysis symptoms. Monitor your pet closely as symptoms will worsen over the next 24 to 48 hours, and the sooner treatment is sought the better their chance of recovery will be.

Leaving part of the tick embedded will not cause your pet's condition to worsen after the tick has been removed. Tick toxin is slow-acting - once the toxin has been injected it's effects will progress to cause paralysis. They can deteriorate quickly.

Avoid old remedies of Kerosene and Turps as these may irritate the animal's skin, are toxic to cats and may in fact cause the tick to inject more toxin. All pets should be searched each day for paralysis ticks.

[What is involved in treating tick paralysis?](#)

Treating tick poisoning is intensive (and can be expensive). The sooner your pet is treated the better the prognosis, and as less intervention will be required the cost will be far less. With early treatment most pets respond well and make a full recovery. Animals which are only mildly affected may recover without anti-toxin, but most will continue to worsen for a day or two after the tick has been removed. To leave an animal untreated is taking a risk.

If you are thinking of NOT treating, at least contact the surgery for advice and preferably have the animal examined by the Veterinarian.

Initial treatment is to administer an antitoxin. This will bind any toxins that are in the blood stream, preventing them from causing further paralysis. Toxins that have already been absorbed into the nerves and muscles will require time to be broken down and removed from the body. Depending on the severity, your pet may require continuous monitoring and intensive nursing care to maintain their airways, often for several days. Treatments may include oxygen therapy, suctioning of the throat, tubing the larynx or trachea, supportive fluid therapy, heating pads, monitoring of blood pressure, temperature and oxygen levels, manual expression of the bladder, sedation, cage rest, anti-emetics, antibiotics and possibly general anaesthesia or ventilation to avoid respiratory exhaustion.

Longer term health effects

Your pets' heart, lungs, muscles, and nerves will not be as strong as they were before the tick paralysis. They will require rest and considerable time to recover from the effects of the poison and avoidance of strenuous exercise or excitement is recommended for up to 2 months afterwards.

Tick anti-toxin does not provide any immunity. In fact, following treatment your pet will be more susceptible to the toxin if they pick up another tick. They can also develop an allergic response to the anti-toxin, so minimalizing re-use is preferable. It is much better to ensure you are using a quality preventative product and performing daily searches during tick season.

Prevention is better than cure