

ORCHARD HILLS VETERINARY HOSPITAL

Tick Paralysis



The poisoning of your pet by a paralysis tick is as serious as a bite from a poisonous snake. Seeking urgent veterinary attention for animals affected by tick paralysis is just as important as it is for those affected by snake poisoning. Well over a thousand pets die from tick paralysis each year.

Several toxic fractions are injected into an animal from the salivary glands of the paralysis tick when it is attached and these toxins can cause many complications. Early treatment with tick paralysis antiserum and hospitalisation will result in saving your pet's life in nearly all cases.

What are the symptoms of tick paralysis?

The earliest signs often suggest that your pet has something caught in its throat or the back legs are not working properly. Other commonly noticed changes are vomiting, heavy breathing with a grunt and alteration to your pet's vocal sounds. While signs vary from patient to patient the usual course is a progressive paralysis with subsequent loss of use of back and front legs. Some animals, especially cats, may become distressed, anxious and confused. Eventually there is an inability to breathe in enough oxygen as the lungs develop congestion and chest muscles become paralysed. When animals are fully paralysed the chances of saving them are greatly reduced.

If you think your pet has a tick, do not give anything by mouth. Contact a veterinary surgeon urgently; keep your pet cool and as calm as possible. Remove tick(s) immediately and take to the vet with your dog or cat.

What to do if you see a tick?

- **Remove the tick immediately as close to the skin as possible**
- **Do not stress or overexert the animal**

- **BRING TO VETERINARY HOSPITAL ASAP**
- **Have someone check the animal for other ticks while in the car on the way in.**

What does treatment involve?

Your veterinary surgeon will consider a possible tick case as an emergency and arrange for a definite diagnosis to be made as soon as possible. It may be necessary for your pet's coat to be clipped off to find the tick or the crater left in the skin where a tick was attached.

While antiserum and hospitalisation involve some expense both are nearly always essential if you want to ensure your pet has the best chance of survival. Hospitalisation is very important as there are often serious complications that require assessment and other medications which can only be given by injection.

Results

The chances of successful treatment decrease as the symptoms progress and there is no way of telling which animals will survive without treatment the only way to ensure your pet has the best chance of survival is to seek early veterinary treatment.

What preventative measures can be taken?

The paralysis tick is extremely resistant to most drugs, however regular tick treatments are vital.

Daily searching of your pet by thoroughly feeling with the fingertips and removing ticks before they inject toxic levels of poison is the safest way to prevent tick paralysis.

Be sure to remove the collar and thoroughly check the head, neck and shoulders as 90% of the ticks will be found in this area. Use tick collars to help discourage ticks from attaching and an application of Frontline 2-weekly during tick season if in a high risk tick area.

Please note: There is no 100% effective tick preventative. Owners must be constantly aware of possible symptoms particularly in high risk areas. If you are taking your pet on holidays up or down the coast, please make sure prevention is working before leaving. Penrith is a relatively low risk tick area, but the occasional paralysis tick may still be picked up from here.

Immunity

There is no vaccination available against the paralysis tick. Some animals develop a natural immunity after exposure to several ticks. The antiserum is made by collecting blood from dogs kept immune by controlled exposure to ticks. It is expensive because there is no way to manufacture it chemically.

Feel free to visit the clinic and talk to our friendly staff about tick prevention,