

HERVEY BAY VETERINARY SURGERY

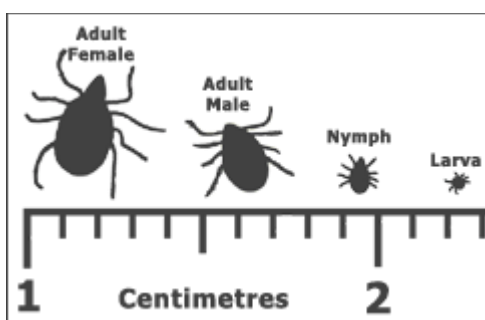
Owner Information Series

PARALYSIS TICKS

The best possible advice regarding ticks is: **Avoid them.**

Unfortunately, that's easier said than done, especially in this area. Because these ticks prefer bushy native terrain and long grass, the worst areas are Craignish, Dundowran, Toogoom and Burrum Heads, but as more land is cleared, the problem spreads. The female of this species is the one that poses the greatest danger to your pets. Not to mention yourself and anyone else in the family.

Although the worst time is from August through March, you can find ticks all year round, particularly when rain follows a period of warm weather.



The paralysis tick life cycle

They may be small, but they're prolific. 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 requisite 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.



What does a paralysis tick look like? - The picture at the top of the page shows a well-sated adult female *Ixodes holocyclus*, the three to the right earlier stages of feeding. They 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

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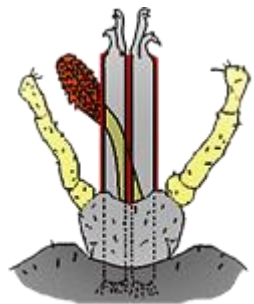
themselves securely to the skin, they can be difficult to remove. When they are pulled out, they usually leave a noticeable crater in the animal's skin which can last for several weeks.



How can you find a tick on your pet?

Although most ticks are found around the head and neck of the animal as well as inside the ears, 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. We find using a tick hook to be the most reliable way to remove ticks. If the head is left in, don't worry as the tick will die and inject no more poison. Always assume there is more than one tick and continue your systematic search.

In case you were wondering, 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 an immunity can still wind up paralysed if they're bitten by multiple ticks or a particularly toxic one. So it's not a good idea to count on your pet being one of the lucky ones.



The business end of a tick

The signs of tick poisoning

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.

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.

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- Weakness in the back legs; walking along then sitting down suddenly is a common early sign.
- Vomiting, especially if it happens several times in a day and you see froth.

Later signs:

- Wobbliness in the back legs.
- Excessive salivation and vomiting is not uncommon.
- Panting, progressing to loud breathing, even grunting noises.
- Many dogs will exhibit a moist cough and breathing problems before other signs. (Particularly common in King Charles spaniels, schnauzers and other short-nosed dogs, this is a dangerous sign because it may lead to pneumonia.)

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.



The residual effect

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 which will then be slowly absorbed. You should keep an eye on him or her for the next two to four days, keeping it cool and calm while avoiding excitement and exercise. Also, do not offer your pet either food or water because its ability to swallow may be impaired. If at any point the signs worsen, call us straightaway. If we are closed, please call the surgery on-call.

Tick paralysis is easily the most common serious problem we see, and we routinely treat affected animals with tick anti-serum. We hasten to add that it does **not** provide any sort of immunity. As you might expect, the sooner we see a poisoned animal, the more effective the treatment.

Even so, this can be a very traumatic time for your pet. Clearly, preventing tick paralysis is a much safer and cheaper alternative than treating the condition once your animal has begun to suffer its effects.

Preventive measures

While new, improved products are appearing quite regularly, the paralysis tick does become resistant to insecticides. Thus, none can ever claim to be 100% effective. So even if you use one (or a combination) of the repellents described below, you should still search you pet(s) *every* night during the tick season. These search-and-destroy missions become even more imperative after your animal has been in bushy terrain. A

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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 scratching.

DOGS

Nexgard™ - Provides flea and paralysis tick control for one month and is a chewable tablet

Bravecto™ - Provides flea and paralysis tick control for 3 – 4 months and is a chewable tablet

Advantix™ – Provides flea control for one month, and paralysis tick control for two weeks. Advantix is toxic to cats and thus caution should be taken when cats are present.

CATS

Frontline Spray® This insecticide is effective for cats when sprayed every three weeks, but only if the coverage is thorough. Registered for tick prevention in cats, it is safe to use from just two days of age.

IMPORTANT: Advantix and dog rinses should never be used for cats. Also, don't rely totally on the products we've listed here. We recommend that you search your pet(s) for ticks every day as well.