



Grafton Dog Obedience Club Inc.

BEWARE OF TICKS

Tick paralysis is an ever present risk for dogs in this area causing serious illness and death in many dogs each year although some dogs do develop immunity to tick poisoning. This year is shaping up to be an especially bad year for ticks. I live in an area where we normally have very few ticks but in the past 2 months I've lost a much loved cat to tick poisoning and found another tick on my very old cat. I've also heard of a number of dogs that have either died or been very ill.

Ticks are most active between September and March but in our subtropical climate they can be found all year round in some areas. If you live in an area where there are paralysis ticks it is safest to use a tick prevention treatment and to search your dog daily. It is recommended that an insecticide is used to kill any ticks before removing them. Attempting to pull a tick out while it is alive may cause it to inject more poison, so kill the tick first then remove the tick, including the head. Contact your veterinarian if you don't feel confident removing the tick/s yourself.

Tick paralysis is caused by the Australian paralysis tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*). About 2 days after a paralysis tick attaches to a dog it starts injecting a toxin (holocyclotoxin) and possibly other substances into the dog and continues injecting toxin for a further 3 or 4 days. The first signs of tick paralysis are usually seen 5 to 7 days after the tick first attaches.

If your dog shows signs of tick paralysis you must do a thorough search to find the tick or ticks (remember the dog may have multiple ticks so don't stop the search after finding one tick). While often found around the head and neck, ticks can be found anywhere on the body including in the ears, mouth and anus. The first sign of tick paralysis is weakness in the hind legs which progresses to all four legs and neck. The dog's ability to swallow is affected and other signs such as loss of voice or change in the voice and incontinence may be seen.

Paralysis prevents the dog swallowing and causes the dog's oesophagus to dilate and fill with food and saliva. This may be regurgitated and can lead to pneumonia if it gets into the dog's lungs. The dog's breathing becomes laboured, the diaphragm can become paralysed and the lungs become congested. The dog may die from respiratory failure due to lack of oxygen, fluid in the lungs and difficulty breathing.

The dog becomes dehydrated as it is unable to swallow. Changes also take place in the blood chemistry. In the later stages of the disease the dog may experience a drop in body temperature.

A dog suffering from tick paralysis is in urgent need of veterinary attention and will require careful follow up nursing to survive. The dog may require sedatives, fluids, antibiotics, steroids and/or oxygen in addition to tick anti-serum depending on the severity of its symptoms. All in all tick paralysis is scary stuff - this is clearly a case where prevention is better than cure!

Paralysis ticks may also carry other diseases such as Scrub Typhus (Spotted Fever) or Lyme Disease, both of which are potentially very serious diseases affecting humans.

Carole Bryant©
