



Collaroy Veterinary Services

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Information sheet

Tick Paralysis

The cause

The cause is the paralysis tick, *Ixodes holocyclus*, which is generally found in bushland areas on the eastern coast of Australia. It is a greyish-green colour and varies in size depending on how long it has been on the pet. After it attaches to the animal, it secretes saliva which contains a neurotoxin into the animal. This causes the disease. The tick fills up with animal's blood and therefore will vary in size as to how big it is when detected – from the size of a pin head to 2-3 cm long. Ticks vary during the year as to how prevalent they are in the bushland, but the season is generally from **September to April**.

The symptoms

The symptoms are usually seen within 3 days of attachment. The most common symptoms include:

- vomiting and/or gagging or refusing food
- drunken-like gait in the hind legs that worsens to complete paralysis and unable to stand
- the bark or miaow sounds different
- slow and laboured breathing, often with a grunting noise on expiration
- an engorged tick may be found, but not always

It is important that treatment is started as soon as possible to be maximally effective. If a tick is found but there are no obvious symptoms, remove the tick and keep your pet as quiet as possible and watch them closely for the next 36 hours.

Treatment

The following procedures are always conducted:

- sedation to prevent the detrimental effects of stress and agitation on the animal
- pre-medication and administration of anti-tick serum
- tick removal and repeated searches for more ticks
- cage rest and close monitoring of body temperature, breathing and heart function.
- monitoring of bladder function, as sometimes it is necessary to manually express or catheterise the bladder until normal function returns.



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In severe cases:

- fluid therapy, either subcutaneously or intravenously
- oxygenation, either via intranasal catheter or with our hospital ventilator
- blood testing, x-rays or other diagnostic procedures

Often animals are in hospital for 2-3 days, sometimes more than a week. This depends on breed sensitivity to the toxin, the age of the animal and how severely it has been affected. An animal may go home once it is breathing normally, able to eat and toilet and is not in danger of asphyxiation pneumonia due to the passage of food or water down the windpipe as the pharyngeal muscles have been paralysed.

After care

Keep your pet in a quiet and cool place for at least ten days after they have come home. Walks must be kept to a minimum. It is better to feed a few small meals rather than one large meal a day.

It is important to remember that the treatment is not long-lasting and they can become infected again, so use protective measures to stop this from happening.

Prevention

Daily tick searches all over the body are very important even if using other tick prevention products as these are not fully effective in prevention, but do help. Tick prevention products include Frontline Top Spot and Frontline Spray for both cats and dogs and Advantix Top Spot and Preventic tick collars for dogs. Ask at the clinic for the most suitable product for your animal.

Removal

When removing a tick, grab the tick by its head, at the point of insertion in the skin, and try not to disturb the body of the tick. The best implement to use is a tick remover which enables easy removal, we always have these in stock.