The key to best practice

PARALYSIS TICK CONTROL

All you need to know about effective paralysis tick prevention for dogs

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WHAT IS A PARALYSIS TICK?

- A bloodsucking ectoparasite that lives on the exterior of an animal.
- Australia’s most dangerous tick.
- There are around 70 tick species in Australia however only a few are known to attach to dogs including the brown dog tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*), bush tick (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*), cattle tick (*Boophilus microplus*) and paralysis ticks (*Ixodes holocyclus*) and (*Ixodes cornutus*).
- Only the female paralysis tick can cause tick paralysis.

DID YOU KNOW?

Native hosts like bandicoots, possums and wallabies are usually unaffected but when the paralysis tick attaches to pets, the outcome can be deadly.

HOW TO IDENTIFY PARALYSIS TICKS

- They are variable in size. A fully engorged female tick may be 15–18 mm long.
- Lighter in colour than both cattle tick and bush tick, and has longer, stronger legs, and larger mouthparts.
- The unfed female is yellow-brown but as it feeds, becomes a pale blue-grey colour and develops a brown, shield-shaped disc, encircling the body.
- Another distinguishing feature is the placement of their legs: clustered at the front of the abdomen and close to the mouthparts. The first and last pair of legs are distinctly darker in colour than the middle pairs of legs.
THE TICK’S LIFECYCLE

- Paralysis ticks must attach and feed on a new host (native animals or our pets) on three separate occasions to complete their lifecycle.
- The first stage is tick larvae: very small, around the size of a fine pin head and often not easily visible to the human eye. Paralysis tick larvae have 6 legs and following a blood meal will drop from the host and moult to the next stage of the lifecycle, now termed as nymphs.
- Nymphs are slightly larger, approximately the size of a small match head and have 8 legs. They also feed from a host before moulting to form an adult tick.
- The lifecycle takes about a year to complete and each stage may be present at any time throughout the year, although adults are more prolific in spring through to late autumn.

WHERE ARE PARALYSIS TICKS FOUND?

- In a narrow coastal band on the east coast of Australia, in an area stretching from Lakes Entrance in Victoria, to the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland.
- A lesser known paralysis tick species also exists in central Victoria and north east Tasmania.
- Commonly found in areas where native animals frequent.
- Usually found in bushland or scrubby areas, particularly long grasses and prefer moist, dark areas.
- Can be picked up in open, urban areas, particularly if native animals are present.

WHEN ARE THEY FOUND?

- Paralysis ticks are most active from August through to December.
- Numbers peak around September-October in Queensland and October-November in New South Wales.
- It is important to note that adult paralysis ticks can be found any time of the year.
The adult paralysis tick is stimulated by carbon dioxide, heat and movement of a potential host. It climbs onto vegetation and waves its forelegs until it makes contact with the host.

Only the female tick will attach to the host, while the male roams the animal looking for a potential mate.

Once on the host, the female may take several days to find an ideal location to attach.

The female tick burrows its mouth parts into the skin and sucks blood from the host.

The feeding process begins slowly to reduce the likelihood of detection. Intermittently, the tick will stop taking blood from the host and injects the host with anti-clotting agents, anti-inflammatory molecules, immune suppressants and excess liquid received from the host’s blood and their saliva.

The saliva of the paralysis tick contains a very potent toxin that affects the dog’s central nervous system and causes progressive paralysis.

The fast phase of feeding then occurs and the tick continues to inject increasing amounts of toxin into the dog. This happens within the final 12-24 hours of feeding, usually 5-6 days after the initial attachment.

The female’s body expands significantly during engorgement and becomes a soft, pale blue-grey colour.

The toxin causing muscle paralysis then spreads and will often cause the dog to stop wagging its tail, be unable to bark or swallow properly, become wobbly or unable to walk and eventually have difficulty breathing.

A susceptible host will begin to show signs of tick paralysis within 3–5 days of tick attachment.

The onset of symptoms after the tick has attached may vary. If left untreated, the dog’s breathing becomes very laboured and the toxin eventually causes the heart to stop beating.

HOW DO TICKS CAUSE PARALYSIS?

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF TICK PARALYSIS?

- Lethargic
- Change in bark tone
- Coughing
- Difficulty swallowing
- A grunt whilst breathing
- Appearing wobbly and uncoordinated
- Weakness in the hind legs, progressing to the front legs
PREVENTING TICK PARALYSIS

- It is crucial to educate pet owners on the east coast of Australia.
- You can give advice on simple measures they can apply for optimum tick prevention.

1. Apply appropriate tick control

Pet owners can become overwhelmed by the number of tick control products available on the market. By assisting them to select the most appropriate tick control for their situation, the risk of tick paralysis can be significantly reduced.

Not all tick controls are the same – unfortunately some products available in Australia are not suitable for paralysis tick control because they take too long to reach maximum efficacy. Look for tick control which reaches maximum efficacy within a maximum of 3 days following application. If a product takes longer than 72 hours to reach maximum effectiveness following application, the treated animal is at risk and could suffer from tick paralysis. Remember the paralysis tick only needs to be attached and feeding for a few days before tick paralysis develops.

The following guidelines are enforced by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority during the registration of tick prevention treatments. You should be aware of these when advising owners about their best option for paralysis tick control:

- **Controls paralysis ticks**
  To gain this claim during registration, the product must prove to eliminate 95% of ticks.

- **Aids in control of paralysis ticks**
  To gain this claim during registration, the product must prove to eliminate at least 75% of ticks.

Now take a close look at the labels of the tick products available. Make sure you’re aware of their registered claims.

Ensure pet owners are aware that daily tick searches are required for optimum protection, as none of the products on the market offer 100% efficacy against deadly paralysis ticks.
2. Checking for ticks

- Pet owners living on the east coast should examine their dog for ticks on a daily basis, even if tick control has been applied.
- The initial, slow feeding nature of ticks gives pet owners a couple of days to locate and remove paralysis ticks before symptoms of tick paralysis develop.

- Check for ticks daily, carefully feeling all over the dog’s coat down to skin level. Pay particular attention to the head and neck, inside the ears, mouth, between the toes, under the front legs, and around the anal and genital areas. Then inspect the rest of the body.
- Remember, the majority of ticks are found forward of the front legs.

3. What to do if a tick is found

- Direct pet owners to contact their veterinarian immediately if they suspect the dog may be suffering from tick paralysis.
- If the dog appears normal and shows no signs of tick paralysis, the owner can remove the tick and continue looking for more ticks, until the entire body is searched.
- It is recommended that owners keep an eye on their dog for the next few days following removal of a paralysis tick, as tick paralysis could still develop. If signs of tick paralysis develop, contact a veterinarian immediately.
- Veterinarians can show pet owners the best way to remove ticks using a pair of tweezers or specialised tick removing tools.
Preventic is the fastest-acting tick control collar, and Australia’s most popular tick collar. Trusted by veterinarians and pet owners in Australia for over 15 years.

How does Preventic work?

- Preventic contains a chemical called amitraz within a slow release collar, which spreads throughout the coat within 24 hours of application.
- Amitraz is naturally attracted to the oily layer of the dog’s skin and hair. It is released at a rate sufficient to kill ticks for 2 months.
- When a tick comes in contact with a dog wearing a Preventic collar, their mouthparts are paralysed and they are killed.
- The action of amitraz prevents the tick from attaching and feeding from the dog, significantly reducing the risk of tick paralysis.

Is Preventic easy to use?

- As the active ingredient in Preventic is contained within a collar, application is simple.
- Fit the collar around the dog’s neck, leaving space for 2 fingers between the collar and the dog’s neck.
- Cut and dispose of excess collar length.
- Once the collar is applied it takes just 24 hours before the dog is protected.
- Ideally it should remain on the dog for the next 2 months.
- Only remove the collar for bathing and swimming. Remember, removal will interrupt the continual supply of amitraz and protection may take 24 hours to re-establish.
Why recommend Preventic?

✅ Fastest acting tick control collar
Preventic begins working within 24 hours of application, unlike other collars on the market which take up to 3 weeks following application to reach maximum levels of tick control.

✅ Detaches paralysis tick
Preventic causes attached, feeding ticks to detach within 24 hours of application, before they have a chance to poison your dog, reducing the chance of toxin exposure.

✅ Australia’s number 1 tick collar
Preventic is Australia’s most popular tick collar, trusted by veterinarians and pet owners in Australia for over 15 years.

✅ Ease of use
Preventic couldn’t be simpler to use. Simply attach the collar to the dog and the active ingredient will begin to work. Cut off any excess length and dispose of it. Check the collar periodically to make sure it has not loosened and re-adjust if necessary.

✅ Affordable
Preventic is a cost-effective solution to tick control, enabling pet owners to remain compliant, particularly during the peak tick season.

SUMMARY

Dog owners need to be aware of the presence of paralysis tick where they live. They can see paralysis tick outbreaks on maps at www.diseasewatchdog.org

It is vital pet owners are aware of the signs of tick paralysis and what to do if their dog is affected. By combining an effective tick control method such as Preventic with daily tick checks, owners can protect their dog against deadly paralysis ticks.

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