

Early tick season: What Aussie pet owners need to know

Cases of dog and cat tick paralysis symptoms have tripled in recent weeks, prompting warnings from vets for pet owners to be vigilant. Here's everything you need to know.



Hayley Goddard

Follow

3 min read August 14, 2023 - 4:27PM

News Corp Australia Network

2 comments

Australian pet owners are being warned to be extra vigilant about deadly ticks, with experts reporting triple the amount of cases in recent weeks.

Dr Sam Kovac, of Southern Cross Vet, said the number of cases of dogs presenting with suspected tick paralysis had “tripled” of late, despite it not being summer.

“We are still in winter and there has been an uncharacteristic spike in tick envenomation cases. The increase has been bizarre,” Dr Kovac said.

He said climate factors, such as La Nina coming to an end, and cost of living pressures could be contributing to a perfect storm putting our furry friends at risk.



Dr Sam Kovac, of Southern Cross Vet, says cases of animals presenting with symptoms of tick paralysis have tripled in recent weeks, despite it being winter. Picture: Supplied

“Maybe the humidity in the ground is starting to evaporate and maybe making an ideal situation for paralysis ticks. Ticks like warm, moist places,” Dr Kovac said.

“Anecdotally, with rising cost of living, people are trying to look at ways to economise and unfortunately a lot of clients are backing off routine flea and tick treatments, especially in the winter months. Some are using the three month treatments but only every four months instead – but they don’t really work a day past what they’re supposed to.

WHERE ARE TICKS FOUND IN AUSTRALIA?

Dr Kovac said there were two types of ticks in Australia that caused illness in dogs.

The brown tick, or cow tick, is located about 20 to 30km away from the coast. They can cause some sickness but are not life-threatening.

The paralysis tick, which causes death in animals, is found in coastal areas along Australia’s eastern flank in tropical, subtropical or northern temperate climates from northern parts of Victoria, throughout NSW and all the way to Far North Queensland.

They live in sand dunes or beaches and bushland surrounding national parks.

SYMPTOMS OF PARALYSIS TICK VENOM?

The venom in paralysis ticks works by targeting the nervous system, eventually resulting in the dog or cat being unable to walk and then suffocating because their diaphragm stops working and they “can’t get air into their lungs”, Dr Kovac said.

He urged pet owners to look out for symptoms of weakness, drool of vomiting up food, as well as a change in the sound of their bark or meow – a pitch higher or more hoarse may be a sign of them having a tick.

“Tick paralysis can kill a puppy within hours, and a big dog without a day or so,” Dr Kovac said.



MYTHS ABOUT TICKS?

It can take less than 30 seconds for ticks to transfer from dog to dog during play, or from the natural environment, Dr Kovac said.

And whether your dog is long-haired or short, ticks don’t discriminate.

“There’s a myth that collies can’t get them but they are the most at risk because you can’t feel for them as easily,” he said.

Dr Sam Kovac said dogs could pick up ticks from bushland or playing with other dogs. Picture: Supplied