



Protect your pet from deadly ticks

By Dr Gretta Howard – Senior Veterinarian

The North Shore and Northern Beaches of Sydney are home to the deadly paralysis tick, *Ixodes holocyclus*. Once attached, it can inject a neurotoxin (nerve toxin) into your pet and cause paralysis and death within 5 days if your pet is not treated promptly. Even with veterinary care, tick toxicity sadly has a **5% mortality rate**.

Peak tick season extends from September to the end of February, although dogs and cats with tick toxicity are still seen during winter.

Clinical signs of tick toxicity include:

- Vomiting or retching (mainly dogs)
- Change in the sound of your dog's bark or your cat's meow
- Inco-ordinated back legs progressing to paralysis of all limbs
- Breathing difficulties

In this area, we strongly advise using a tick preventative **all-year-round**.

Dogs:

Our preferred product is a **Bravecto chew given every 3 months with food**.

There is also a topical Bravecto product which can be applied every 3 months instead of the chew, but in our experience, the chew is more reliable as a preventative product, though the topical product is a good option for dogs that refuse to eat the chew.

Cats:

Our preferred product is **Bravecto spot-on applied every 2 months in cats that go outdoors**.

Seresto Collars:

For extra protection in both dogs and cats, use a Seresto tick collar to help repel ticks.

In conjunction with the Bravecto chew or spot-on, a **Seresto collar** can be worn, which acts as a repellent to ticks, but should not be relied upon by itself. A Seresto collar **lasts 4 months** and help prevent tick bites and tick-borne parasites in your pet.

Search for ticks:

As with all products, there is no guarantee, so we still recommend performing a **daily tick search** on your pet, particularly concentrating around the head, neck and shoulders, where 70% of ticks attach to. A tick clip to keep your dog's coat short in spring and summer can also help reduce tick paralysis because you can find the ticks more easily and remove them.



What to do if your pet has a tick:

If you find a tick, your pet is still at risk of developing toxicity for up to 24 hours after tick removal, even if there are no clinical signs of tick toxicity at the time of tick removal. We recommend one of our vets remove the tick for you if you are unsure how to do this. A **tick twister** is a hook-like product which can assist in removing the whole tick quickly. Our vets can then assess your dog properly to ensure there are no clinical signs of tick toxicity. Do not try to kill the tick before removing it from your dog. This can increase the amount of toxin released.

How to treat tick toxicity:

If your pet is showing signs of tick toxicity, then it is vital that you get to a vet urgently. The sooner the anti-tick serum is administered, the less neurotoxin will bind to the neuroreceptors and the faster the recovery. It is important that pets with suspected tick toxicity have their coat clipped very short to ensure **all ticks are removed** as where there is one, there may be more ticks.

The average length of hospital stay is 3-5 days, often requiring intensive care such as oxygen supplementation, or even mechanical ventilation at a 24-hour emergency hospital. Your vet will assess the severity of tick toxicity and advise you of the recommended treatment plan.

It is much better to prevent tick paralysis in the first place, than risk this deadly toxin affecting your pet.