

Parasites You Should Tick Off

Pets are an all-time favourite at home and are becoming increasingly present in the vicinity of the workplace. With their presence comes ticks, external parasites that feed on our blood and that can transmit dangerous diseases.

Ticks survive by feeding on the blood of mammals, humans, birds and other warm blooded species. Paralysis ticks, in particular, are native to Australia and pose a common health issue through-out the country, especially along the East Coast. They are known to infest cattle, horses, other livestock and domestic pets. However, due to their frequent exposure to tick infestation, native animals are usually immune to the paralysing toxin in ticks.

Paralysis ticks spend much longer periods on the ground than they do on animals and can be found on hosts at any time of year. However, adult ticks are most commonly seen from September through to December with a peak availability of young adults in spring.

Ticks do not pose a major problem in New Zealand, however the cattle tick is a common cause of death in young calves. Most tick activity is between late Spring and early Autumn, but they can be active during colder months year round. Like in Australia, ticks can be picked up in both rural and urban areas.

Symptoms and signs:

- Restlessness in the bitten human/animal.
- Weakness in lower limbs which starts spreading. The victim might fall down and/or display in-coordination
- In children, apart from restlessness and irritability, there may be vomiting, anorexia and malaise. The symptoms can sometimes turn fatal.
- Dogs typically exhibit signs like wobbliness in hind limbs, excess salivation, general lethargy and weakness, changes in bark, vomiting and loss of appetite.
- Ticks often fall off before being found, but they might leave behind a red, raised bump or bite mark on their victim.

Symptoms can take 4-5 hours or a few days to appear.

Why Ticks are a problem

The paralysis tick can have a serious effect on any host that it lands on, be it a human or animal. They inject a toxin causing paralysis that can be extremely harmful and is potentially fatal.

An estimate of approximately 50,000 pets per year become affected by paralysis ticks along the East Coast. Farmers should be aware that the same tick can kill up to 10,000 calves.

Ticks are generally associated with bushland and shrubs, so nearby council parks, retirement villages, farms and residential homes are vulnerable to tick infestations.

For an online version, check out our blog post here.

