



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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## Tick Paralysis

### Issue Description

*A rare, progressive, reversible disorder caused by several species of ticks that release a neurotoxin that causes weakness, incoordination, and paralysis. The tick must feed on the host for several days before the symptoms appear, and removal of the tick leads to rapid recovery.*

### Causes

It is caused by tick bites, especially near the neck or shoulders.

### Symptoms

The first sign in the dog is incoordination and weakness as he becomes unable to move his hind legs. The paralysis slowly moves upward, involving the front quarters. The dog will usually have a normal temperature and show few signs of illness except he will be unable to function. Difficulty in chewing and swallowing follow, and in a heavy infestation, the paralysis can involve the dog's respiratory centers in the brain, causing difficulty in breathing and death in only a few hours. The incubation period is 5-7 days and paralysis can peak within a few hours, but timely removal of any ticks bring about a rapid recovery.

### Diagnosis

No specific tests are available to diagnose canine tick paralysis. It is diagnosed based on acute sudden onset of progressive hind limb paresis and paralysis in a tick-infested area. The offending tick may not be present by the time clinical signs begin. Blood and chemistry values are usually within the normal range.

### Treatment

Signs of improvement are seen within 24 hours following removal of ticks. The presence of additional ticks or other causes of paralysis must be considered if the animal does not recover following tick removal. The prognosis in most cases is good.

Affected animals should be kept in quiet and relatively dark environments, with comfortable bedding provided. Recumbent animals should have their heads elevated to prevent aspiration and excessive saliva should be removed.

Animals usually require hospitalization for 24-48 hours.

### Prognosis

Visible improvement should be noticed within 24 hours following tick removal. Death occurs in less than 5% of patients. Elderly dogs with pre-existing heart or lung conditions may be at higher risk.

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