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Veterinary newsletter

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A Warning about Ticks

New Zealand appears to be lucky in having only one major stock tick – it has a long name, *Haemaphysalis longicornis*, and can be a tricky opponent when it comes to gaining control. Geographically ticks are found right through the North Island, in Marlborough and Tasman and parts of the West Coast.

Adult ticks have eight legs and prior to a feed on one of its many hosts (which can include humans), it is about 3mm long, 2mm wide and is red-brown in colour. Once it has partaken of its blood feed it will be 9mm long and 7mm wide and have turned blue-black in colour. Ticks typically have three life stages – adults, which feed on an animal then drop off to lay eggs; these hatch into larvae which crawl onto the animal and feed, then they drop off to moult into nymphs which in turn feed, drop off and moult into adults to start the cycle again.



Over 80% of the tick lifecycle is spent off the animals. This is important as they are often not on the host, meaning that control is not just about dipping animals, it is also about making it harder for ticks to survive off the host.

Ticks were appearing on farms in large numbers and while we usually associate ticks with deer farms, they were causing significant clinical issues on all manner of animals - lots of sheep, some cattle, a few horses and plenty of pet dogs and cats. A key to understanding severity is remembering that heavy burdens on small animals can lead to anaemia and even death; so particularly a concern for fawns, lambs, kids and calves but also production losses occur in adult stock. Of particular note is their role in the transmission of Theileria, which has created all manner of mayhem in dairy and beef herds with serious losses of production and some deaths. In many cases, farmers had never seen ticks on their farms yet their cattle were suffering from theileriosis. This shows that ticks pretty much exist wherever the conditions are right – the right environment means the right temperature and humidity, hence the generally North Island-wide distribution.

Unfortunately, every tick that you saw in summer and did not kill, will have been able to breed after having a decent feed from whatever host you saw it on. The large ticks are all adults and shortly after they have had their fill of blood they drop off and lay hundreds of eggs. It is the ensuing lifecycle that we are now concerned about and it is likely that we could see a similar explosion of numbers next summer as there are simply so many young ticks about.



Too Hot to Handle

Being in the middle of summer it is important to talk about the detrimental effects the heat can have on our pets. What can we do to prevent an often lethal heat stroke?

- ⇒ Always provide shelter and shaded areas
- ⇒ Always provide plenty of fresh water
- ⇒ Never leave your pets in the car on a warm day



- ⇒ Do not over exercise your animal on a warm day, make sure you get out early in the morning or at night when temperatures drop again
- ⇒ Leave a plastic milk jug filled with frozen water or a frozen big flat stone in the rabbit hutch as a portable air conditioner
- ⇒ Provide a paddling pool for the water keen dogs

Signs of overheating

Initially the pet appears distressed, will pant excessively and become restless. As the hyperthermia progresses, the pet may drool large amounts of saliva from the nose and/or mouth. The pet may become unsteady on his feet. You may notice the gums turning blue/purple or bright red in colour, which is due to inadequate oxygen.

What to Do

- ◆ Remove your pet from the environment where overheating occurred.
- ◆ Move your pet to shaded and cool environment, and direct a fan on him.
- ◆ If possible, determine rectal temperature and record it.
- ◆ Begin to cool the body by placing cool, wet towels over the back of the neck, in the armpits, and in the groin region. You may also wet the ear flaps and paws with cool water. Directing a fan on these wetted areas will help to speed evaporative cooling.
- ◆ Transport to the closest veterinary facility immediately.

What NOT to Do

- ◆ Do not overcool the pet.
- ◆ Do not attempt to force water into your pet's mouth, but you may have fresh cool water ready to offer should your pet be alert and show an interest in drinking.
- ◆ Do not leave your pet unattended for any length of time.

Drenching your stock

Unfortunately, our lifestyle block animals are infected by a variety of different worms. These produce eggs that pass out onto the pasture in their dung. These eggs then develop and become infective larvae. The number of larvae present on pasture is directly affected by weather, with spring's warm and moist conditions being the best for larval development. These larvae are infective to other animals grazing the pasture and hence the cycle of re-infection continues.

The number of eggs and larvae present on the pasture is much higher than the number of worms inside animals, therefore effective worm management is more than just drenching.

Lambs, kids and calves should be receiving their first drench (de-wormer) at about 6-10 weeks old, once they've been grazing the grass for a few weeks. It is important to use "First Drench" in lambs and goat kids to protect against tapeworm – those grotty white segments you see in their poos. Expect to see more after drenching, as all the dead adults flush out!



Remember that any drench can be dangerous if overdosed, so make sure an accurate weight of the animals is estimated (even better is actually weighing them). If you are drenching a group, try and dose to the individual.

Under drenching can be just as problematic as this means the strongest worms will survive and breed, to create an army of SUPER WORMS resistant to our drenches. As many lifestyle blocks graze animals between one to two paddocks throughout the year, this can become a headache very quickly.

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If you are concerned about drench resistance, then it is best to have a discussion with your vet about your management strategies going forward. This will involve taking some poo samples to look at the egg burden before, and then 10 days after a drench. Changes in grazing strategies and cross grazing may be recommended.

Adults require regular drenching during summer to protect them against barber's pole, a nasty blood-sucking worm that makes affected animals very anaemic and can even kill the animal. Sheep, goats and alpaca are at high risk, especially if run together.

Also, when drenching your alpaca and goats, they require 1.5x the sheep dose rate you will find on the label, unless the product contains Levamisole, then use sheep dose only.

Certain drenches are required at specific intervals during summer, so talk to us in-clinic to ensure you get it right. We also have small volumes of drench available so you can buy what you need rather than a 10 year supply!

Keep an eye out for toxic algae

In rivers, toxic algae generally form brown, dark green or black mats that grow on rocks in the river bed. Mats that come loose from the riverbed can wash up on the banks or form floating 'rafts' in shallow areas. When exposed, the mats may dry out and turn a light brown or white colour and may also produce a strong musty odour. Dogs love the smell and can eat it. Even a small amount, the size of a 50 cent piece, can kill a dog.

Cyanobacteria differ from harmless bright green algae, which often form long filaments.

In lakes and slow-flowing waters, cyanobacteria grow in a free-floating (also called planktonic) form which can cause the water to become murky or cloudy. Free-floating cyanobacterial blooms are generally green in colour and can give lakes a 'pea soup' appearance.

Free-floating cyanobacteria can also form films or scums on the water's surface, especially at the water's edge.



Toxic algal mat growing on the rocks



Toxic algal mat growing on the river bed

Check for alerts before you head to the river or lake. Avoid contact with toxic algae but you do have to eat the algae for it to be harmful. A small number of people are very sensitive and may experience skin irritation after being exposed. If you experience a reaction after contact or swimming, contact your doctor.

Dogs are most at risk as they like the smell and taste of toxic algae. Keep an eye on your dog when near the river or lake. If there is an alert or you think you have spotted toxic algae mats keep your dog on a lead, out of the water and most importantly, ensure it does not eat any algae mats in the water or at the water's edge.

If you suspect that your dog has eaten toxic algae, contact your vet immediately.

In extreme cases, death can occur within 30 minutes after the first signs of illness appear. Signs a dog has been poisoned by toxic algae include lethargy, muscle tremors, fast breathing, twitching, paralysis and convulsions.