

December 18, 2020

New Tick Disease is Killing Our Dogs

Roper Gulf Regional Council is urging dog owners to protect their dogs from a new tick disease called *Ehrlichia canis* that is quickly spreading throughout communities and sadly killing a large number of dogs in the region.

The disease *Ehrlichiosis* is new to Australia. First detected in Western Australia in May this year, the disease has spread throughout the Northern Territory through the brown dog tick population and is confirmed to be present in all communities within the Roper Gulf region.

Roper Gulf Vet, Dr. Samantha Phelan, is hoping to spread the message about this tick disease to dog owners living in the region to ensure that appropriate prevention strategies are in place to stop the spread of the disease.

“This is a devastating disease. Over the last 3 months, we have seen a tsunami of this sickness spread through dogs in the Katherine and Roper Gulf communities and it is spreading rapidly through the NT and Northern WA.

“The Ehrlichia bacteria is spread by a tick bite. An infected tick only needs to be on a dog for one hour before transmission occurs. Dogs quickly become very sick. They go off their food, become very lethargic, lose weight, often develop blue or cloudy eyes and develop clotting problems in their blood.

“While some dogs recover, many die quickly from bleeding that cannot be stopped or from a slower wasting sickness that ultimately kills them. It can be very traumatic for families and the veterinary staff looking after the dogs,” Dr. Phelan said.

If caught early, the sickness is often treatable. If your dog goes off its food, it is important to take them to your nearest vet as soon as possible. However the antibiotic treatment may not always work, particularly if treatment is delayed.

With this sickness, prevention is definitely better than cure. Stopping any single tick from biting your dog is now really important. A combination of a good quality long acting tick collar to repel ticks and an oral or backline medication to kill any tick that may attach is the best prevention.

Dr. Phelan is urging all dog owners to speak to their vet about the best choices for tick prevention.

“A long acting tick collar may be the best Christmas present you could give a dog owner this Christmas,” she says.



Each brown dog tick is capable of laying up to 3000 eggs, although even this number is treatable with new medications available. Photo from Hillcrest Animal Hospital.

Not taking action to prevent this sickness may also have human health implications, as internationally Ehrlichia has been shown to infect people as well.

“It isn’t common that people become infected, and we still do not know what strain we have here in Australia, but it is a disease of humans also.

“Anyone that has been bitten by a dog tick and has become sick within a fortnight is urged to seek medical advice and to tell health staff about the tick bite. This is an emerging and new disease in Australia, and we all need to be reminded that it is out there and in big numbers,” said Dr. Phelan.

-ENDS-

For further information please contact Roper Gulf Regional Council on Telephone: (08) 8972 9000 or Email: info@ropergulf.nt.gov.au

Media Contact:

Bethany O’Sullivan

(08) 8972 9024

bethany.osullivan@ropergulf.nt.gov.au