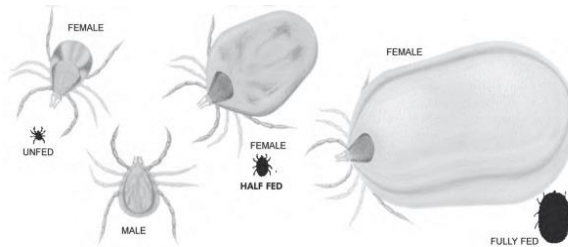


Alpaca parasites – paralysis tick

The Australian paralysis tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*) is endemic along the east coast of Australia and is responsible for thousands of livestock deaths each year and, regrettably, the alpaca is no exception. The ‘tick season’ varies from one region to another and may start as early as June/July but in some areas has been known to be active all year round.

Identification of paralysis tick

The paralysis tick is relatively easy to identify. The legs form a V-shape line from the snout down the sides of the body; the first and last pair of legs are brown and the second and third pair are pale. The body is pear-shaped to oval and yellow-grey to light grey with a dark band on the sides; the face is oval but wider at the rear and brown; the snout is very long.



Effect on the alpaca

If there is the slightest possibility that an animal is suffering the effects of poisoning by a paralysis tick, it is essential to thoroughly check the animal, particularly the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, external genitalia and under each leg. The paralysis tick secretes a neurotoxin in its saliva that causes a progressive paralysis of the hind limbs and eventually respiratory failure. The tick may go unnoticed (particularly when the alpaca is in full fleece) until weakness and difficulty in walking develops; **urgent veterinary advice is essential at this stage.**

Paralysis ticks are very difficult to control because:

- they are only attached to animals for a short period of about a week,
- each non-parasitic stage may survive for up to nine months on the ground
- they can attach to native animals which cannot be treated with a tickicide.

Where possible breeders should be limiting the use of chemicals and this can be achieved by implementing sound farm practices and reviewing pasture and grazing management.

Disclaimer: This advice is of a general nature. Seek veterinary or expert advice for your circumstances.

Farm management practices

- Paddocks should be clean, free of scrub, rough grass and lantana and, if possible, minimal exposure to native fauna (which are notorious for carrying ticks).
- Newborn and young cria are very vulnerable therefore careful selection of clean paddocks must be given high priority. Most breeders will have this group in a 'maternity paddock' for the first few weeks.
- Paddock rotation, sowing improved native pasture species and keeping pasture short are also considered to be very beneficial.
- Whilst not always possible in larger herds, physically checking the cria daily is a certain way to detect ticks before paralysis becomes apparent.
- If an animal is not keeping up with the herd or is listless and has difficulty in walking, and especially in the hind legs, be very concerned.

Tick collars

Tick collars are not registered for use on alpaca, but in consultation with your vet you might consider their use, especially for cria. Tick collars should contain the chemical amitraz for maximum efficiency. Ensure the collar fits well, allowing one or two fingers to slide between the collar and the cria's neck, and remember to check the fit regularly – cria grow fast!

If using Cydectin as a tick control it can select resistant parasites when used too often. This will apply not only for the cattle tick being targeted but also for internal parasites such as Barber's Pole Worm. (The active ingredient in Cydectin is Moxidectin, a broad spectrum parasiticide).

Conclusion

The Australian paralysis tick will always be a part of some regions of our landscape and alpaca breeders in those areas will have to learn to live with them! As with so many management practices any prophylaxis is dictated by the environmental and climatic conditions together with the breeders' experience and herd size. Breeders can try many different techniques which will minimise exposure but there is no sure way to prevent paralysis occurring in alpacas.

Disclaimer: This is general advice. Consult your veterinarian for advice specific to you.

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