

Looking after your dog in the East Gippsland bush

SNAKES

There are several species of venomous snakes in East Gippsland that could pose a threat to your dog.



Photo: Brown Snake © Scott Eipper

Precautions

Dog owners should take these precautionary measures whilst in the bush, particularly during the spring, summer and autumn:

- Avoid areas with dense vegetation near water.
- Restrain your dog on a leash.
- Choose to walk in an open area where you can have visual contact with your dog at all times.
- If your dog seems unusually curious about 'something' hidden in the grass, call it and back off immediately until you know what it is.

Symptoms

All veterinary clinics in East Gippsland are aware of the types of snakes found in this district and have the appropriate antivenene.

Snakebite symptoms can include the following:

- Changes to normal behaviour.
- Initially vomiting, shivering, shaking, muscle twitching.
- Eventual total paralysis, tongue lolling, dilated pupils, laboured breathing, agitation.
- Hyper-activity followed by unconsciousness.

What to do

- Do NOT wash the area of the bite (venom traces may be used for identification).
- Apply a pressure bandage firmly, using a folded pad placed over the bitten area and extending outwards.
- Immobilise the limb, by placing it in a makeshift splint/sling.
- Soothe and reassure the patient; keep your dog quiet and prevent it from running around.
- Bring transport to the patient/try to prevent walking and movement.
- Seek immediate expert veterinary attention. If possible, phone ahead to the veterinary clinic to ensure a veterinarian is available and allowed time to prepare for your arrival. If treated as soon as possible, a dog bitten by a poisonous snake has a good chance of recovery.

What NOT to do

- Never try to cut the bite.
- Never try to suck out/remove the poison.
- Never apply an arterial tourniquet.

Remember that snakes are protected wildlife and should not be killed unless they pose an immediate threat – remember the bush is their home, too.

PARALYSIS TICKS

Dogs are sensitive to toxins found in the saliva of the paralysis tick (*Ixodes holocyclus*). This tick is found in coastal areas of East Gippsland. Left untreated, the outcome is usually fatal. Ticks range in size from a few millimetres (juveniles) to the size of a small fingernail (adult). Native hosts include bandicoots, wallabies and echidnas, which have immunity to the toxins.



Ticks latch on to passing animals that brush against long grasses and leafy vegetation. They may be difficult to observe, particularly in long-haired dogs. The warmer months, particularly following rain, is the time dogs can be most affected by tick paralysis – though ticks can be encountered all year round.

Precautions

- Avoiding coastal areas, especially bushland.
- A daily search of your dog.
- Insecticidal baths.
- Tick-killing tablets, spray or spot-on preparations specific for tick control.

A tick usually has to be on an animal's body for more than two days to cause paralysis. Any dog suffering from tick paralysis should immediately receive treatment from a vet. Antiserum is available and, if treated quickly, dogs stand a good chance of survival.

Symptoms

- Retching, coughing or vomiting.
- Loss of voice or bark.

- Loss of coordination in the hind legs.
- Progressive paralysis to include the forelegs.
- Difficulty breathing or rapid breathing.
- Lethargy and lack of appetite.

Ultimately there is:

- Complete inability to stand or lift the head.
- Extremely laboured breathing.
- Coma and eventually death.

What to do

- Remove the tick (if found) using a pair of tweezers or long fingernails. Pull firmly and continuously, twisting in a clockwise motion. The whole tick, including the mouthparts, need to be removed. Do not crush or squeeze the tick during removal, and ensure it is destroyed to avoid re-attachment with another host.
- Contact a veterinarian for advice, a checkup or further treatment. Advise the vet that you have been in a coastal area and suspect tick bite. A dog showing any symptoms within 24 hours of removing a tick requires early treatment. Early treatment offers the best and quickest chance of recovery.

POISON BAITS

Throughout Victoria private landholders and government agencies use buried baits containing the poison 1080 ('ten-eighty') for wild dog and fox control.

In East Gippsland several programs are underway to reduce the numbers of foxes and wild dogs.

The largest of these is 'Southern Ark', an ongoing fox control program being undertaken across one million hectares of National Park and State Forest. The program aims to improve the conservation status of a wide range of native animals.

Visitors must be aware that their dog could be at risk of consuming a bait, if it wanders along bush tracks unleashed in baited areas.



Precautions

All bait stations have been located well away from where visitors to the region are likely to frequent. This includes all picnic grounds, lookouts, campsites and places of interest. However, extensive areas of bushland are baited. Non-poisoned baits are also used prior to a poisoning program.

Visitors are advised to take the following precautions:

- Avoid areas that are potentially baited.
- Be aware of signs fixed to prominent trees advising Southern Ark baiting in progress.
- Never allow your dog to wander alone or unleashed on bush tracks.
- Remember that dogs are not permitted in National Park, which is included in the East Gippsland baiting area.
- Always assume that if you are in rural areas, including public land in East Gippsland, baits may be located in the vicinity.
- Consider muzzling your dog.
- If in doubt call in or telephone the Orbost DSE office for advice on the Southern Ark baiting program.

Symptoms

These may occur some hours after eating a bait. Your dog may show a variety of signs that can be very subtle in the early stages:

- Anxiety.
- Frenzied behaviour such as running and howling.
- Hypersensitivity to sound and light.
- Failure to respond to owner.
- Vomiting or urinating and defecating inappropriately.

As the toxicity progresses, other symptoms may develop:

- Convulsions.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Respiratory failure.
- Coma followed by death.

What to do

If you see your dog consume a bait, but either no symptoms have yet occurred or you know there will be a long delay before reaching a veterinary clinic:

- Induce vomiting – only if no symptomatic behaviour has yet been exhibited. Considerable care must be taken when inducing vomiting as your dog may be in a hypersensitive state and react violently or bite; exposed toxic vomit may be a hazard to other dogs. Table salt (1 – 3 tablespoons orally) or a dilute mustard and water solution will usually induce vomiting.
- If your dog is showing signs of poisoning, protect it from injuring itself (or others) by wrapping it in a blanket or putting it in a box.
- If your dog is convulsing, keep fingers clear of its mouth. Providing good airflow and keeping the dog cool may also be helpful.
- Take your dog to a vet as soon as possible.

Further Information

- Contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Orbost office on (03) 5161 1222.
- Email: southern.ark@dse.vic.gov.au

If you suspect your dog has consumed a bait, and is displaying one or more symptoms, take it immediately to the nearest vet. If possible, telephone the clinic in advance to allow them time to prepare for your arrival. Immediate veterinary attention should still be sought even if you have successfully managed to make your dog vomit the bait – your dog may still have absorbed some of the toxin.

The sooner action is taken following a real or suspected poisoning incident, the better the prognosis will be, despite there being no known antidote to 1080 poisoning.

Enjoy your visit to East Gippsland, making sure your dog's visit is a safe and happy one, too!

Veterinary Clinics in East Gippsland

BAIRNSDALE, 323 Main Street.....	(03) 5152 6666
BOMBALA, 66 Caveat Street.....	(02) 6458 3981
EDEN, 2 Irene Crescent.....	(02) 6496 1252
LAKES ENTRANCE, 9 Princes Highway...	(03) 5155 3599
ORBOST, 32 Salisbury Street.....	(03) 5154 2387

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For more information contact the DSE Customer Service Centre 136 186 or DSE Orbost Office (03) 5161 1222.

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Looking after your dog in the East Gippsland bush

Reducing the risk from snake bite, ticks and wild dog and fox baiting programs.



Photo: "Boofa" © Andrew Murray