



Common Intestinal Worms & Parasites

Intestinal parasitism is a common and potentially severe problem in veterinary medicine. The number of organisms that can infect our domestic animals is staggering. Only the most common parasites of dogs and cats found in this part of the country are discussed in the article.

Current recommendations by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) are that all young animals should be dewormed at least three times and have routine fecal exams to identify any intestinal parasites not eliminated by deworming.

ROUNDWORMS

- Location - Lives in the small intestine, look like spaghetti if they are passed.
- Diet - Steals nutrients in the pets' diet.
- Transmission - Eggs are passed in the feces and then are ingested by the next host. Additional means of infection are the transmission from mother to fetus in the uterus or in the milk after birth. Infection can also be acquired by hunting and eating smaller animals infected with the parasite.
- Diagnosis - Finding eggs in a fecal sample or an actual worm in the feces or vomitus.
- Treatment - Oral deworming medication.
- Importance - Can cause unthriftiness in young animals, poor coat, vomiting, and pot-bellied appearance. Can cause malnutrition in any age animal. *Can be transmitted to humans.*
- Frequency of infection - Very common, especially young animals.
- Prevention - Monthly treatment with a parasite prevention product, e.g. Sentinel (dogs) and Revolution (cats).

HOOKWORMS

- Location - Lives in the small intestine, very small worms.
- Diet - Feeds on blood. Can kill a puppy or small animal due to blood loss.
- Transmission - Eggs are passed in the feces. The eggs develop into larvae in the environment. These larvae can then be ingested or actually penetrate the skin and migrate to the intestines. Puppies can also be infected through their mother's milk.
- Diagnosis - Finding eggs in a fecal sample or suspicious symptoms.
- Treatment - Oral deworming medication.
- Importance - Can cause death in young animals due to anemia. Can cause severe bloody diarrhea, dehydration, and anemia in any age animal. *Can be transmitted to people although the occurrence is low.*
- Frequency of infection - Very common, both young and mature animals.
- Prevention - Monthly treatment with a parasite prevention product, e.g. Sentinel (dogs) and Revolution (cats).

WHIPWORMS

- Location - Found in the cecum (portion of large intestine).
- Diet - Feeds on blood.
- Transmission - Eggs are passed in the feces. The next host ingests the eggs and gets infected. Eggs can withstand severe weather conditions (heat and cold).
- Diagnosis - Finding eggs in fecal sample or suspicious symptoms.
- Treatment - Oral deworming medication.
- Importance- Can cause bloody diarrhea and dehydration.
- Frequency of infection - Very common, both in young and mature animals. Prevention - Monthly treatment with a parasite prevention product, e.g. Sentinel (dogs).

TAPEWORMS

- Location - Adult worms live in the small intestines of dogs and cats.
- Diet - Steals nutrients from the hosts' digestive tract.
- Transmission - Most commonly contracted by eating fleas that carry the parasite. Can also be acquired from hunting and eating rodents or rabbits.
- Diagnosis - Noting segments (possibly moving) on a fecal sample or adhered to the pet's fur. Looks like grains of rice. Eggs are not usually found in fecal sample.
- Treatment - Oral dewormer. Requires a different drug than the other intestinal worms.
- Importance - Of little importance in healthy adult animals, however, they are quite aesthetically disturbing. A new variety of tapeworm (Echinococcus) is becoming more widespread and may become very important as it is transmissible to people with serious consequences. It is currently not found in Southern Indiana.
- Frequency of infection - Very common, especially if fleas are a problem.
- Prevention - Good flea prevention and deworming pets 2-4 times per year that hunt.

COCCIDIA

- Location - Protozoal parasite of the small intestine.
- Transmission - Eggs are passed in the feces. The eggs are either ingested directly by the next animal or a rodent may consume the eggs and subsequently be eaten by the next host.
- Diagnosis - Appearance of feces and-or eggs found in stool sample.
- Treatment - Oral antibiotic.
- Importance - Can cause dehydration, mucoid diarrhea and death, especially in young animals. Adult animals may have no symptoms.
- Prevention - Good sanitation.

GIARDIA

- Location - Protozoal parasite found in the small intestine.
- Transmission - Ingested from contaminated water sources (ponds, streams).
- Diagnosis - Giardia can be difficult to find in fecal samples. Diagnosis can be suspected due to the clinical signs (chronic diarrhea with or without blood) and lifestyle of the pet.
- Treatment - Oral antibiotics.
- Importance - Can cause diarrhea and dehydration. Potential for human transmission is primarily from the contaminated water source.
- Frequency of infection - Actual frequency is not known as infections are difficult to verify.
- Prevention - Don't allow your pet to drink/swim in contaminated water.