



Intestinal Parasites

Intestinal Parasites In Your Pet

No matter how good a pet owner you are, most dogs or cats will become infected with some type of intestinal parasites in their lifetime. This is no reflection on you. Most puppies and kittens are born with worms. Adult pets can come into contact with them through contaminated stools, soil, or by ingesting a flea while grooming. Some pets test positive for worms without showing any outward symptoms at all. Although you shouldn't be too alarmed, your pet will need to be treated. Puppies and kittens can become seriously ill from these parasites. Medicines are available to remove the worms and, in many cases, reduce the risk of re-infection. By following our veterinarians' recommendations, you can protect your pet and your family from these potentially harmful parasites.

Have your pet tested for parasites on an annual basis. At Indian Hills Animal Clinic, we screen for adult worms as well as microscopic eggs. Keep if you have any questions, feel free to ask a staff member for more information about intestinal parasites.

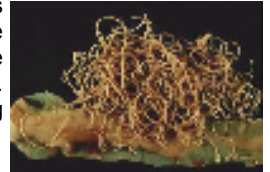
Most Common Intestinal Parasites

ROUNDWORMS

Nearly all puppies and kittens have roundworms. It is not uncommon for adult dogs and cats to become infected as well.

How Do Pets Get Roundworms?

Infection usually begins when your pet accidentally swallows roundworm eggs in soil. These eggs hatch into tiny worms that move from your pet's intestine to its liver and lungs, and then back to the intestine where they mature. The adult roundworm lays eggs that are passed from your pet's stool to the soil. Female dogs and cats can also pass roundworms to their unborn or nursing puppies or kittens.



Signs of Roundworm Infection

When left untreated, roundworms can cause a "potbelly" appearance and diarrhea. Vomiting, a rough hair coat, and poor growth are other signs. Heavy infections damage your dog's liver, lungs and brain. Death is possible. Canine roundworms actually infect humans and can migrate to the eyes and other internal organs! People contract the parasites by touching their mouths with hands contaminated by roundworm eggs (most commonly in the soil).

HOOKWORMS

Hookworms are tiny, threadlike parasites that affect puppies and adult dogs (although less common, cats can also contract hookworms). They are a particular problem in areas with warm, moist, sandy soil.

How Does Your Pet Get Hookworms?

The cycle begins when hookworm eggs are passed in stools to the soil. Your pet can swallow the young hookworms or they can penetrate its skin, usually through the paw pad. Like roundworms, hookworms are also passed from female dogs or cats to their puppies or kittens. Hookworms present a slight risk to humans if larvae in the soil contact skin. Painful skin sores can result.

Signs of Hookworm Infection

Hookworms feed on blood and tissue by piercing your pet's intestinal lining with tooth-like "hooks", often resulting in severe blood loss. A puppy can die from as few as 100 hookworms. Dogs with heavy infections often have bloody diarrhea. Other signs include anemia, dehydration and apparent weakness. Some pets, however, show no outward symptoms.

WHIPWORMS

Dogs confined to small, outside areas are at the highest risk of contracting whipworms.

How Does Your Pet Get Whipworms?

Whipworm infection occurs when your pet swallows whipworm eggs from stool and soil. After hatching in the small intestine, whipworm larvae move to the large intestine where they mature. Here, adult worms lay eggs which are passed in your pet's stool to contaminate the soil.



Signs of Whipworm Infection

Light infections of whipworms are difficult to diagnose, but they can lead to more serious problems. Large numbers of whipworms irritate the lining of your pet's intestine, this causes weight loss and pain. Watery, bloody stools may result. Severe infections can cause life-threatening dehydration and anemia. Whipworms are not dangerous to humans.

How to Prevent Roundworm, Hookworm, or Whipworm Infections

- ◆ Schedule an appointment for your new puppy with us as soon as possible to test for internal parasites.
- ◆ All puppies and kittens are wormed appropriately.
- ◆ Ask for an bi-annual stool check on your dog or cat.
- ◆ Never feed your pet on the ground. Food and water should be given to your pet in clean dishes.
- ◆ Always clean up your dog or cat's stools on a regular basis, before they can break down in the soil, to reduce soil contamination.
- ◆ Wash your hands after working in dirt that might be soiled by dogs or cats. Instruct children to routinely wash their hands after playing outside. Always wash your hands before eating.
- ◆ If your pet lives in a pen with a washable surface, sanitize the area with diluted chlorine bleach before returning your dog to its quarters.
- ◆ If your dog returns to the same infected ground, treatments will be required every three months. A new site is preferred.

Other Types of Intestinal Parasites

COCCIDIA

Coccidia are small organisms that infect dogs and cats, and are transmitted most often to animals that stay in kennels or catteries, pet stores, or other places where pets are in close contact with each other.

How Do Pets Get Coccidia?

Adult coccidia in an infected dog or cat will pass tiny egg-like organisms called "oocysts" through the pet's stool. If your pet accidentally eats these oocysts, they break open in the intestine and release new organisms, which move to the intestinal wall. These new organisms multiply rapidly and become either new oocysts to be passed out again with the stool or they return to another cell and multiply. Your infected pet is both increasing the number of internal coccidia organisms and contaminating the environment at the same time.

Signs of Coccidia

Small amounts of Coccidia are not dangerous, but once they begin reproducing they begin to destroy your pet's intestinal cells. Some can move to the liver and brain and destroy cells there as well. Symptoms can include bloody diarrhea, abdominal pain, listlessness, dehydration and weight loss. However, your pet may exhibit no signs of infection at all. Only a stool check can determine if your pet is infected. As with all intestinal parasite infections, puppies and kittens are most at risk.

TAPEWORMS

Tapeworms are one of the most common intestinal parasites in pets.

How Do Pets Get Tapeworms?

Your pet contracts tapeworms by ingesting fleas while grooming, or by eating rabbits, mice, rats and other animals that carry tapeworm larvae. Adult tapeworms live in your pet's intestinal tract and release segments filled with eggs through the stool.

Signs of Tapeworm Infection

Because tapeworms irritate your pet's intestine and reduce food absorption, they may cause weight loss or loose stools. More often, there are no symptoms at all. Owners usually detect a tapeworm infection by seeing small rice-like segments around the anal area.



How to Prevent Coccidia and Tapeworm Infections

- ◆ Clean up your pet's stools.
- ◆ Consult with one of our veterinarians. Although no monthly preventative exists, we can prescribe medications that treat either parasite.
- ◆ Sanitize your dog's kennel or pen, or your cat's litter box with diluted chlorine bleach.
- ◆ Prevent your pet from catching and eating prey if possible. Don't feed your dog or cat prey scraps unless fully cooked. (And never feed your pet bones!)
- ◆ If your pet is exposed to fleas or if it hunts outside, regularly look for tapeworm segments in your pet's stool, and around the anus. In a fresh stool, these segments may be alive and moving. In older stools, or around the pet's bedding, they look like grains of rice. If your pet has fleas, they are at risk for a tapeworm problem.
- ◆ Begin a flea control program to prevent flea-carried tapeworm infections. This program needs to include treating all of your pets, as well as their indoor and outdoor environments.

At right: Roundworm and Hookworm Eggs. Below: Roundworms

