

# Worms And Parasites

A fecal (stool) exam is used to diagnose the presence of intestinal parasites. A fresh stool sample from pups or kittens should be treated by your veterinarian when they're 6-8 weeks. Adult pets should have their stool tested annually. A heartworm test is used to search your pet's blood for evidence of heartworm infection.

## Types of internal parasites:

**Roundworms or ascarids** are intestinal parasites found in both dogs and cats. But, the common ascarid of cats does not infect dogs and vice versa. Roundworm infection can be fatal in young puppies and kittens. Infection in healthy adult pets is seldom serious.

**Hookworms** are bloodsucking parasites found in both dogs and cats. But the common hookworm of dogs does not infect cats and vice versa. Hookworm infection can cause severe, even fatal blood loss-especially in pups.

**Tapeworms** are common intestinal parasites of dogs and cats. Fleas, rabbits, mice, rats and other animals carry an intermediate stage in the life cycle of tapeworms. Dogs and cats can become infected by eating the carriers. The most common tapeworm of dogs and cats is carried by fleas. If your pet is exposed to fleas, watch for tapeworm segments passing with your pet's stool.

**Whipworms** are intestinal parasites of dogs. They sometimes cause diarrhea.

**Coccidia** are intestinal parasites of dogs and cats, which can cause diarrhea and weight loss. Coccidiosis usually affects young dogs and cats, especially those from places where large numbers of animals are kept together, such as kennels, catteries, and pet stores.

**Toxoplasma** are intestinal parasites of cats can infect people. Cats become infected after eating mice, rats, and birds or meat containing Toxoplasma cysts.

**Heartworms** are most common in dogs, but cats have known to be infected. They are parasites that spend their adult life in the heart and large blood vessels. They are transmitted by mosquitos.

## Practical considerations

**Human health:** There are some diseases, including parasitic diseases, that can be transmitted from pets to people. However the risk is extremely small if you make sure your pet receives proper health care. This includes regular physical examinations, fecal analyses, heartworm prevention, vaccinations, and appropriate treatment when ill. To avoid Toxoplasmosis: Cook meat before feeding to your cat and discourage your cat from hunting: pregnant women should not clean litterboxes and should wash their hands after handling cats.

**Pups:** Generally you should have a stool sample from your pup checked by a veterinarian when the pup is 6-8 weeks old. But if the bitch has had a litter of pups with roundworm or hookworm problems, subsequent litters should be treated early. Preferably pups should be treated at 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age.

**Kittens:** You should have a stool sample from your kitten checked by a veterinarian when the kitten is 6-8 weeks of age.

**Pregnant dogs:** The mother dog can transmit roundworms to her pups while they are in her uterus. She can transmit roundworms and hookworms and through her milk when pups nurse. Treatment of the mother to reduce numbers of worms transmitted is difficult but possible. Oral medication for the pregnant bitch must be given from the 40th day of pregnancy and continued daily until two weeks after whelping-that is about 37 consecutive days.

**Adult dogs and cats:** Generally adult pets should have their stool checked by a veterinarian once a year as part of an annual physical exam.

**Heartworms:** Heartworm infection is difficult to treat. Prevention is a far better alternative. Your veterinarian can prescribe a variety of medications to prevent the disease. In areas of the country where heartworm infection is most prevalent (Atlantic and Gulf coasts, states along the Mississippi River) pups should be started on heartworm preventative as soon as they are weaned.

**Feeding:** Pet food should never be placed directly on the ground. Use of food and water bowls which are cleaned daily will help decrease your pet's exposure to intestinal parasites.

**Fleas as a warning sign.** If your dog or cat has fleas, you should be on the lookout for tapeworm segments passing with the stool or on your pet. If found, report them to your veterinarian for recommendations and treatment.