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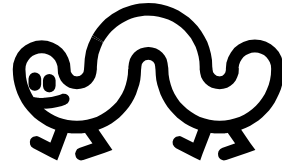
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Worms

The first thing to be clear on is that dogs and cats get worms and they aren't dissimilar to the ones you might see in the garden but these worms attach to your pets' insides and nosh.

What types of worms do dogs and cats get?

There are 2 types of worms: roundworms which are like spaghetti and tapeworms that are made up of a whole chain of rectangular or seed shaped segments stuck together.



Where do the worms come from?

Dogs and cats can get infected with tapeworms from eating fleas, lice or raw meat. Tapeworms are most common in cats, who get infected when they have been hunting and snacking on their prey between proper meals.

The most common roundworm infecting dogs and cats is *Toxocara*. This worm lives in the dog or cat's intestine and lays eggs which pass out in the faeces. These eggs then infect other dogs and cats who are sniffing around and nibbling on the odd blade of grass and mouthful of whatever looks tasty. The dog or cat doesn't even need to eat poo to get infected as the clever worms hatch quickly, wriggle their way out of the faeces and wait for unsuspecting hosts in less smelly environs. These worms also infect the majority of puppies and kittens by passing from the mother through the placenta (pups only) and in the milk (pups and kittens).



There are other species of roundworm that are also ingested from the soil but more recently it's slugs and snails that have become an issue. In recent years the incidence of lungworm, a worm that finds the gut too claustrophobic and prefers the comfort of the heart and blood vessels leading to the lungs, has increased. Dogs can be infected with lungworm by eating slugs and snails and with the very soggy summers we've been having they may just be too plentiful to resist.

Do the worms cause a problem?

The short answer is yes. The long answer is...

Tapeworms don't tend to cause disease in dogs and cats but very large infections can block the gut just through sheer numbers. The worms shed sections of their bodies containing the eggs and these can sometimes be seen crawling out of the animal's bottom (yuck!). The crawling worm segments can also itch causing the animal to rub its bum on the carpet (although much more

commonly this is due to full anal glands). One species of tapeworm infecting the dog can infect people resulting in painful debilitating internal cysts which have to be removed surgically.

Toxocara are reasonably well tolerated by adult dogs and cats but can cause disease particularly when the worm larvae migrate around the body through the organs. Puppies and kittens can be more seriously affected by adult worms resulting in poor growth, pot bellies and even blockage of the gut. The biggest problem with Toxocara is that it infects people, especially children, resulting in a variety of disease forms. Toxocara larvae in people can migrate through the eye interfering with vision, even causing blindness, or through other organs such as the liver or lungs. Children can become infected by accidentally ingesting eggs or larvae which have crawled out of poo that may have been on the grass several weeks before.

Lungworm causes a spectrum of disease in dogs, from a cough to bleeding and heart failure.

How can I prevent and treat worms in my pet?

There are many wormers on the market which are very effective. You can treat worms using tablets or 'spot on' treatments which get absorbed through the skin on the back of the neck. Each individual dog or cat will be at different risk of infection from different worms dependant not only on their age and lifestyle but also the age and lifestyle of the family they live with.

For example:

- Puppies and kittens – the majority are carrying worms so they need treating more frequently.
- Hunting cats – are constantly exposed to tapeworms in their prey so they need treating more frequently.
- Indoor cats – have very little exposure to worms and so need worming less frequently. However it is still important to worm indoor cats occasionally as they may become infected with worms from eggs and larvae you unwittingly bring in from outside.
- Dog or cat belonging to a family with young children – needs worming more frequently to prevent exposing the children to disease.
- Dog that is walked in an area where children play – needs worming more frequently to prevent exposing the children to disease.

We can advise you on what wormers you should be using and how frequently, then we can even remind you when your pet is due by email or text message.

