



# Canine Companions Rescue Center

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## Worms and Parasites

Canine Companions Rescue Center recommends testing all dogs and puppies for worms and parasites when you take them home (except for Heartworm which will already have been done). As you will see below, dogs that have been in an environment with many other dogs are particularly susceptible. The stool test is fairly inexpensive and so is the treatment for most worms and parasites.

### TESTING

A fecal (stool) exam is used to diagnose the presence of most intestinal parasites. A fresh stool sample from pups should be tested by the veterinarian when they are 6 -8 weeks of age. Adult pets should have their stools tested as part of their annual physical examination.

A heartworm blood test is used to search your pet for evidence of heartworm infection. Heartworms cannot be found with a stool test.

### TYPES OF INTERNAL PARASITES

**Roundworms (ascarids)** are intestinal parasites found in both dogs and cats, but the common ascarid of cats does not infect dogs and vice versa. Pregnant dogs and cats can transmit roundworms to their offspring before they are born. Roundworm infection can be fatal in young puppies and kittens. Infection in healthy adult dogs is seldom serious. Roundworms are passed in your pet's stool, and they look like long strands of spaghetti.

**Hookworms** are the most prevalent gastrointestinal parasites in dogs of all ages. They can also be found in cats, but the common hookworm of dogs does not infect cats and vice versa. Infection is caused by direct contact with hookworm larvae generally shed in the stool of an infected dog or cat, but a pregnant pet can transmit hookworms through her milk when nursing her offspring. Hookworm infestation can cause severe, even fatal, anemia and stunted growth in young puppies and kittens. Older animals may show signs such as diarrhea, anemia, weight loss or a thin hair coat. Hookworms can infect humans, usually from direct contact with the hookworms. To prevent infestation, humans must always wear shoes outside, always lay on a lounge chair or blanket (never on the bare ground) and wear gloves when working in the yard or garden.

**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 become infected with tapeworms by eating these carriers. The most common tapeworm of dogs and cats is carried by fleas. If your pet is exposed to fleas, or hunts and eats any of the other animals mentioned, he may have tapeworms. If your pet has a ravenous appetite yet is losing weight, he probably has tapeworms. If he is infested, you would see the rice-like segments in his stool or around his rectum.

**Whipworms** are microscopic intestinal parasites common in mature dogs and pups older than 4 months. Infection results from ingestion of mature whipworm eggs. The eggs are shed by an infected dog through his stool and live in the soil. The eggs can live in the environment for several years. Signs of whipworm infection include diarrhea containing fresh blood and mucus, vomiting, weight loss and mild anemia.

**Coccidia** are microscopic 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.

**Heartworms** are parasites that spend their adult life in the heart and large blood vessels. They are most common in dogs, but the incidence in cats is growing. Mature heartworms look like strands of spaghetti within the heart and/or blood vessels of the infected animal and can be detected through a blood test. Heartworm is transmitted to your pet by mosquitoes. Symptoms are not usually seen until there is a large number of heartworms in the blood stream and heart, and your dog may cough, act listless and seem to tire easily.

## **TREATMENT**

Parasite infections can be treated medically by a veterinarian. If your pet shows any symptoms of such an infection a veterinarian should be seen, and a stool sample tested.

Heartworm infection is difficult to treat - prevention is a far better alternative. Heartworm preventative that can be given daily or monthly is available. You can choose the type which fits your lifestyle best and give the dosage routinely as directed by your pet's veterinarian. Pups should be started on heartworm preventative at 6 weeks of age. Adult dogs *must* be blood-tested before they can be started on heartworm preventative.

There are some diseases, including parasitic diseases such as hookworms, which can be transmitted from pets to people. However, the risk is extremely small if you make sure your pets receive proper health care including regular physical examinations, fecal analyses, vaccinations and appropriate treatment when ill.

## **PREVENTION**

Some infections can be prevented by keeping your pets away from the feces of other animals. If your pet has been infected with any type of intestinal worm or parasite, picking up his feces right away can minimize the chances of reinfection. Pet food should never be placed directly on the ground. Using food and water bowls which are cleaned daily will help decrease your pet's exposure to intestinal parasites.