

Some worms we find and what they do to your dogs and cats

Toxocara canis



Yellowish-white roundworm infests dogs. Adults range from 9 – 18 cms long. They migrate through the lungs to live in the intestines. Relatively asymptomatic in adult dogs but can cause coughing during the lung migration phase. They become dormant in pregnant bitches but just before whelping they ‘wake up’ and start laying eggs. These pass to the pups either through the placenta or through the milk and are potentially fatal.

T canis can be passed on to humans (zoonosis) and can cause potentially catastrophic diseases including blindness.

Toxascaris Leonina

Yellowish-white roundworm infests dogs and cats. Live in the gut and absorb nutrients meant for the dog or cat.

Toxocara cati



The cat roundworm. White roundworm with characteristic black, twisted intestine. The head is shaped like an arrow head. Can grow to 10 cms in length

These worms live in the gut and are relatively asymptomatic. Heavy infestations of young cats however, can be fatal.

Whipworms



Cats transmit whipworms (*Trichuris trichiura*) into their system through ingestion of infested matter. Able to live in an environment

anywhere from a few months to a few years, whipworm eggs can be present in soil, food, and water, as well as in faeces and animal flesh. They can also be contracted from other animals. Additionally, whipworms infect cats of any age.

Dogs carry *Trichuris vulpis*. They are present in the environment and in infected faeces. Symptoms can include bloody diarrhoea, weight loss and vomiting but they can also be asymptomatic.

Hookworms



Uncinaria and *Ancylostoma* infest dogs and cats.

Thankfully quite rare these nasty parasites can also be passed on to Humans!

Hookworms are small, thin worms about one-quarter to one-half inch (.6 to 1.3 cm) long. They fasten their mouth parts onto the mucosa of the small intestines and suck blood and tissue fluids from the host. This can result in severe blood loss and malnutrition.

There are five routes by which puppies (and adult dogs) can acquire the infection:

- Migration through the placenta in utero
- Ingesting larvae in mother's milk
- Ingesting larvae in the soil
- Direct penetration of the skin (usually through the pads of the feet)
- Ingesting an intermediate host

The majority of serious hookworm infestations in puppies occur during the first two months of life and are acquired through the mother's milk. Signs of illness include bloody, wine-dark, or tar-black diarrhoea. Progressive blood loss may cause these puppies to rapidly sicken and die. Intensive veterinary management is required.

In adult dogs, the most common routes of infection are ingesting larvae and larvae migrating through the skin. Some larvae encyst in tissues, while others migrate through the lungs to the intestines, where they mature into adults. In two to three weeks the dog begins to pass eggs in her feces. These eggs incubate in the soil. Under proper conditions, the eggs hatch in 48 hours and release larvae that are infective in five to seven days.

Tapeworms

Dipylidium caninum. Despite the name this tapeworm can infest both dogs and cats. The intermediate host is the cat flea *Ctenocephalides* or biting lice. If your dog or cat has this tapeworm he must at some time, have come into contact with fleas or lice and you don't have to own a cat to contract these fleas as they live freely in the environment!

D. caninum lives in the gut and releases segments which pass out of the anus. They are able to move around and can often resemble tiny maggots! The eggs are released from these segments and fleas eat the eggs. The dog or cat then swallows the flea during grooming sessions and is then infested.

Taenia is most common in cats but can also infest dogs. This tapeworm has intermediate hosts such as rabbits, birds, mice and squirrels or even sheep! Therefore if your cat (or dog) goes hunting he will probably come into contact with these parasites.

Echinococcus granulosus lives in the small intestine of dogs. The intermediate hosts are sheep and humans! The cysts formed by these parasites develop into Hydatid cyst disease. Most prevalent in Wales and South West England. The cat version is *E. multilocularis* which is not currently found in the UK however, cats traveling abroad may come into contact with it. This is also passed onto humans.

Lungworm and Heartworm



There is a full description of both of these on another information sheet on this site.

Protozoans

We can also check your sample for Giardia and coccidia. These protozoan parasites can cause diarrhoea, often blood stained, especially in pups and kittens. Generally infection occurs from drinking contaminated water. Just let us know if you want us to check for it on the form when you send us the sample.

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