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Veterinary Center

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# Intestinal Parasites: Protecting Your Pets and Your Family.

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## ***Why are pet parasites a human health concern?***

Intestinal parasites common to dogs and cats not only spread from animal to animal, they can also spread from animals to people. This is called, "parasitic zoonosis." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that each year 3 to 6 million Americans are infected with roundworm larvae? In most cases, the transmission of zoonotic parasites occurs through accidental oral ingestion of parasite eggs from a contaminated environment, from accidental ingestion of an infected flea, or by penetration of the skin by parasite larvae. This can cause human infection, such as skin rashes, intestinal disease, blindness, coma, or death. Proper deworming and environmental clean-up are essential to protecting not only your pet, but you and your family as well.



## **Quick Facts about Intestinal Parasites:**

- A recent national survey showed that 19% of dogs were infected with hookworms.
- Fleas can transmit tapeworms.
- In a recent study, 10-30% of public soil samples were contaminated with intestinal parasite eggs.
- In just one week, two puppies infected with roundworms can shed over 20 million eggs, contaminating a 2,800 square-foot backyard.

## ***How will I know if my pet is infected?***

You may not recognize any illness or see obvious symptoms of parasitic infection. Parasite eggs are shed by animals in their stools and can often be detected by microscopically analyzing a stool sample. In some instances parasite eggs may not be seen in a sample if the animal is not shedding eggs. It is therefore recommended that all new pets be preventatively dewormed. Most intestinal parasites can multiply at an alarming rate, so even a single intestinal worm can become a fast-growing problem.



## ***How can I protect my pet and family?***

Contaminated pet droppings can carry infective eggs (the source of most pet-to-human infections). Follow these steps to protect your pet and family:

- Have your pet examined regularly by a veterinarian.
- Deworm your pet on a regular schedule as recommended by your veterinarian.
- Practice good hygiene. Wash hands after handling pets or cleaning up pet waste.
- Remove pet droppings from your yard at least 2-3 times per week- daily is best, however.
- Clean litter boxes daily and wash hands afterwards.
- Keep pets flea-free.
- Place a cover on all sandboxes.
- Do not drink from streams or other sources that may be contaminated with animal feces.
- Make your veterinarian aware of any changes in your pet's environment, behavior, and of his travel history.

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### Roundworms (also known as ascarids):

Roundworms are large, cream-colored worms that typically grow 10 to 15 cm long. While these worms are easy to see if they are expelled in vomit or feces, it is quite possible that infected pets will show no outward symptoms of a roundworm infection. These infections are very common in puppies and kittens.

Roundworms are prolific egg shedders — a single female can produce up to 100,000 eggs a day. Pets often become infected by ingesting soil or vegetation contaminated by these shed eggs. In addition, pets can become infected by consuming a secondary host (such as a rodent, rabbit or bird), through their mothers before birth (puppies) or by nursing.



Adult roundworms



### Hookworms

Hookworms are typically about 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch long and are found in the small intestines of cats and dogs. They live on blood and tissue, often rapidly leading to serious illness and death. In fact, as few as 50 worms can be fatal to a puppy or kitten.

A female hookworm often sheds eggs at the rate of 25,000 a day, quickly contaminating an environment. Pets then become susceptible to infection by either ingesting hookworm larvae or by the larvae penetrating a pet's skin. Puppies born to previously infected mothers will also generally become infected through nursing.



Adult hookworms

“Roundworms are prolific egg shedders — a single female can produce up to 100,000 eggs a day.”

### Tapeworms

Tapeworms are found in both dogs and cats. They are the most visibly detectable intestinal parasites, as they often appear as rice-shaped segments around a pet's anal region or in its feces. Some tapeworms do not have visibly detectable segments and can be the source of some of the most serious and life-threatening diseases to humans.

Because heartworm preventatives generally offer no protection from these parasites, it's critical to protect your pets from these pests with a complete intestinal parasite protection program. Tapeworms require an intermediate host (generally fleas, rabbits, or rodents) to mature, so pets can only become infected by ingesting a host carrying the infection.



Tapeworm

#### References:

1. Bayer Animal Health. *Preventative Deworming*, 2005.
2. Bayer Animal Health. *All About Intestinal Parasites*. [www.noworms.com](http://www.noworms.com).
3. Brooks, Wendy. *Intestinal Parasites*. The Pet Health Library; [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com).

### Whipworms

Whipworms are found mainly in dogs, whipworms attach themselves to a pet's large intestine where they feed on blood.

Pets can only become infected by whipworms through the ingestion of eggs, but unfortunately, whipworm eggs are especially hardy. They can survive in soil for years, even in the coldest climates, quickly re-infecting pets that frequent contaminated areas.



Adult Whipworm