

## INTESTINAL PARASITES:



## TESTING, PREVENTION, & TREATMENT

### ***What is an intestinal parasite?***

Dogs and cats can serve as “hosts” to many organisms that live in their intestines and these organisms are known as intestinal parasites. Dogs and cats can share them easily and pass them on to you and your family. Many parasites can be found in sandboxes, dirt, and grass and parasite eggs can live in your pet’s feces outdoors for months. Four groups of worms – roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, and tapeworms, and a few species of single-cell organisms, such as coccidia and Giardia – are the most common intestinal parasites.

### ***How does a pet become infected with intestinal parasites?***

Your pet can become infected with intestinal parasites through many routes, including:

- ✓ Drinking contaminated water
- ✓ Coming into contact with infected animals or their feces
- ✓ Fleas carrying the infective stage of tapeworms
- ✓ Nursing from an infected mother
- ✓ Eating a rodent or other infected animal

### ***What type of pet is most likely to get intestinal parasites?***

Any dog or cat can become infected with intestinal parasites, but young pets seem to be more susceptible than adult pets.

### ***What are the physical signs of a parasitic infection?***

Sometimes there are no symptoms of parasites, especially for well-fed pets in the early stages of infection. Keep an eye out of these changes, as they could indicate a heavy parasite infection:

- Change in appetite
- Coughing
- Diarrhea (sometimes with blood)
- Weight loss
- Skin irritation and itching
- Scooting on the rear end
- Rough or dry coat
- Overall poor appearance

If you suspect the presence of parasites, call us immediately. Don’t forget, we live in the south with warm humid weather most of the year – as a result, bugs and parasites abound. Part of our ***Early Detection Program*** is a fecal exam, recommended twice yearly, to detect the presence of these parasites.

### **Fecal Examination**

The doctor will examine your pet’s feces to check for the presence of intestinal parasites (such as roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, and Giardia) or to evaluate various intestinal disorders. Microscopic examination of your pet’s feces can provide useful information about difficulties with digestion, internal bleeding, and disorders of the pancreas, as well.

### ***How is an infection of intestinal parasites treated?***

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Medication will vary depending on the parasites involved. The doctor may prescribe pills, powders, liquids, or injectable medication. Many of these medications are easy to administer, and you may be able to give them to your pet at home.

Do not use over-the-counter preparations, as they may not be effective against all types of parasites and may not treat the type of parasite that has infected your pet. Trust your veterinarian to prescribe the safest, most effective medication for your pet.

Most treatments take only a few days, but some require follow-up treatment in a few weeks. Periodic testing is necessary to ensure all intestinal parasites have been eliminated. In most cases, you should wash your pet's bedding and clean his living environment to prevent re-infection.

## ***How do I keep my pet from getting intestinal parasites?***

Bowel movements are the source of most intestinal parasites. To avoid infection, keep your pet away from areas where other animals relieve themselves. Dispose of your own pet's bowel movements as quickly as possible, and keep your pet and his environment clean. Here are some other ways you can protect your pet:

- Keep your pet and the environment free of fleas by using a monthly preventative product that is recommended by your veterinarian. Your pet may swallow a flea that is carrying tapeworm eggs.
- Ask your veterinarian to perform a fecal exam (microscopic examination of your pet's feces) every 6 months as a good preventative measure. Routine, frequent fecal checks are important for predatory dogs and cats because some types of worms are ingested when a pet eats an infected rodent.
- Treat puppies and pregnant dogs according to your veterinarian's recommendations, as their needs are somewhat different from adult animals.

## ***Can I get intestinal parasites from my pet?***

Under some conditions, intestinal parasites can be transmitted from pets to people. Especially at risk are children, pregnant women, and immuno-compromised individuals, such as people with AIDS. Parasitic larvae can migrate through the human body and lodge in the eye, brain, or other areas, which can cause blindness or other severe health problems. Avoid walking barefoot or letting children play in areas where dogs and cats defecate, such as yards, beaches, and sandboxes. The danger is real – discuss the risk with your veterinarian and physician.

Intestinal parasites are a threat to you, your family, and your pets. Your veterinarian should check your puppy or kitten for intestinal parasites each time he is vaccinated. Your adult dog or cat should be checked every 6 months. Protect you family and your pet. Some products offer the benefit of controlling external parasites, such as fleas and ticks. The doctor will discuss with you monthly preventatives that will not only control intestinal parasites, but heartworms as well. For more specific information on preventing and treating the deadly heartworm parasite, our easy-to-read Heartworm handout can be obtained either on our website or at our office.

## **Preventive Measures for Everyone**

1. See your veterinarian and test twice yearly for parasites.
2. Remove all pet feces from your yard as often as possible, and dispose of immediately.
3. Wash your hands well with soap and water after playing with pets and coming in from outdoors.
4. Teach your kids not to eat dirt.
5. Check and clean all pet kennels, crates, and bedding areas frequently.

Our veterinarians follow the recommendations of the Center of Disease Control to protect you, your children, and your pet from intestinal parasites. To learn more, visit the CDC *Healthy Pets, Healthy People* webpage at <http://cdc.gov/healthypets/>.