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## **Canine And Feline Intestinal Parasites**

There are six common intestinal parasites found in dogs and cats. To be able to identify these parasites two types of examinations are used. The first of these is a fecal flotation exam that will help to identify hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, roundworms, and coccidia. The second option is a direct fecal smear that is also helpful in revealing these parasites. For any new puppy or kitten these tests are recommended and for any animal having diarrhea.

**HOOKWORMS** (*Ancylostoma* spp): Adult worms live in the small intestine. The eggs pass out of the body through the feces of the animal. The animals become infected with hookworms by eating infective eggs or larvae; penetration of footpads or skin by the larvae; transmission through the milk; or, transmission from the mother to fetus while still pregnant. Hookworms can cause severe anemia in the young, weak and malnourished animals. The most common signs are weight loss, diarrhea, and bloody stools. Sometimes but not always the worms are seen in the feces. The worms look like long strings of spaghetti and will be passed once oral deworming medication is administered. If there are other pets in the home they should be treated for hookworms as well. Hookworms are a zoonotic disease, which means the larvae can penetrate human skin and cause a skin problem called 'cutaneous larval migrans'. No one should be barefoot during the 5-7 days your animal is being treated.

**ROUNDWORMS** (*Toxocara* spp): These adult worms live in the small intestine and the eggs are passed in the stool. Animals become infected with roundworms by ingesting other infected animals; such as rats, or by prenatal infection. Your veterinarian will be able to detect microscopic eggs that pass through the stool within 3 weeks of infection. Worms can also be vomited up. The infection can cause poor coat quality, diarrhea, and a pot-bellied appearance. These worms, like the Hookworms, look like spaghetti, and can be treated with an oral medication, and a follow up dose give 3 weeks later. Roundworm larvae can penetrate human skin and can affect various organs in the body. Again, no one should be barefoot for 5-7 days following treatment.

**WHIPWORMS** (*Trichuris* spp): Whipworms are hard to diagnose since they do not show up until 3 months of age or older. The adults live in the large intestine and the eggs are passed through the feces. The eggs may be hard to spot in the feces given that whipworms are not prolific egg layers. The animal becomes infected from ingesting fecal matter. Clinical signs of infection are weight loss,

and diarrhea with or without blood. Treatment is an oral medication with a follow up in 3 months.

**TAPEWORMS** (*Dipylidium* and *Taenia* spp): The adult worms live in the intestine of dogs or cats. The larvae is ingested by eating an infected flea. The most common way of diagnosing tapes are by seeing small “rice-like” worms in the stool or around the anal area; or by seeing the eggs on a fecal flotation exam. Some clinical signs include; shaggy coat, irritability, diarrhea, scooting, licking anal area, or lethargy, but most signs are rare due to the fact that tapeworms rarely cause a problem. Treatment for tapeworms is an oral or topical medication or an injection. To prevent tapeworms prevention of exposure to fleas is necessary. People can become infected with the *Echinococcus* and *Taenia* spp by association with infected dogs or infected meat.

**COCCIDIOSIS** (*Isospora* and *Eimeria* spp): There are different species of coccidian that infect all animals. Infection occurs due to unsanitary conditions, and fecal-oral transmission, most commonly seen in the young and immune suppressed. Signs of infection include, weight loss, lethargy, and mucoid diarrhea. Treatment is oral medication given for 10 days. If there are other pets in the home they should be treated as well due to exposure.

**TOXOPLASMA:** This parasite is important because of its zoonotic potential, and is a parasite that infects cats. If a woman is exposed to this parasite for the first time and is pregnant, the baby is at a serious risk to have congenital problems. If a woman has already been exposed, there is no danger. The *Toxoplasma* is spread in the fecal matter of cats, and does not become infective until 3 days after being passed by the cat. **HOWEVER**, more people get *Toxoplasma* by eating improperly washed vegetables and improperly cooked meats.