

Worming!

Be a responsible pet parent- Protect your pet from worms!

Out of sight and out of mind...Don't let them worm their way in!

Unlike fleas that are usually seen on your pet, intestinal worms are not easily seen and are something you might not think about much. It might surprise you to learn that your pet doesn't have to look sick to be carrying and passing on worm infections. Some worm species can produce up to 30,000 eggs each day which contaminate your pet's surroundings.

In New Zealand where humans, especially children, share such a special relationship with our four-legged friends, there is a risk of zoonotic disease (the transfer of infection from animal to human). The good news is you can take preventative action by worming your pets regularly. Simple measures such as practicing good personal hygiene, treating for intestinal parasites in your pet and making potentially contaminated areas off limits to children will help protect your family.

What kind of worms can infect your pet?

Once they've found their way into the gut, parasitic worms will survive by feeding on the contents of your pet's gut or sucking on your pet's blood. Left untreated, they can be a serious health risk. That's why it's important to treat your pet at least every three months.

ROUNDWORM: a real pain in the tummy

Roundworms are picked up from your pet's environment (soil and droppings). They are common in young pets as infections can be passed from mother to puppy or kitten. Roundworms live in the intestine where they will eat their fair share of your pet's meals. Roundworms can also infect humans, especially children, and potentially cause blindness. Signs of infection in pets include vomiting, diarrhea, coughing or a bloated stomach. Severe infections can cause death. Roundworms are exceptionally good survivors, and their eggs are able to live outside the animal for several years.

HOOKWORM: blood meals on tap

Hookworms can cause serious illness to pets and humans. Juvenile worms emerge from infected faeces and infect pets or humans after penetrating through the skin or by being swallowed. Once in the intestines, the worms feed on blood. Heavy infections can cause severe blood loss and even death- another good reason to keep your backyard free of droppings.

WHIPWORM: an intestinal assassin

Whipworms are blood feeding worms that live in the dog's intestine. They cause pain, diarrhea and weight loss. They can survive for up to a year, potentially laying over 2000 eggs each day. The eggs are passed in the droppings and can survive in soil and the pet's surroundings for up to 5 years.

LUNGWORM: something to cough about

Cats can become infected with lungworm after eating infected mice, rats or birds. They can develop a cough, racing heart and weight loss, or may show little or no signs at all. However, infections can leave permanent scarring in the lung.

TAPEWORM: a reason to itch

This particular tapeworm comes from infected fleas that are ingested by your pet. While not a major health risk, it develops in the intestine into large worms which cause an itchy bottom when segments are passed in the droppings. You may see your pet scooting along the ground. Flea control is an essential component of protecting your pet and family against this parasite.

TAENIA SPECIES: when food bites back

There are several other species of tapeworms that can infect our pets. Dogs can pick up the Sheep Measle Tapeworm by eating raw sheep or goat meat. These worms can shed 250,000 eggs each day and survive on pasture for 6 months. If sheep or goats ingest the eggs, cysts develop in their tissues, resulting in the condemnation of the meat during processing. There are additional species of tapeworm that cats and dogs can pick up from rabbits or rodents during hunting.

Where is my pet exposed to worms?

The great outdoors. It's where your pet can run like the wind, explore and discover...and pick up worms...ewww! In the early stages of a worm infection, your pet may show few, if any, noticeable signs of infection.

- * Loss of appetite; an advanced worm infection can make your pet feel bloated and may put them off their food.
- * Vomiting; some worm infestations can cause vomiting, with worms sometimes visible in the vomit.
- * Pot-belly; a pot-bellied appearance due to worms is particularly common in puppies and kittens
- * Dull coat; because worms can cause your pet to become malnourished, they can also cause a dull coat. However, this can also be due to fleas or a poor diet.
- * Scooting; scooting is when a pet drags its bottom along the ground.
- * Diarrhoea; diarrhea due to a worm infection is particularly common in puppies and kittens.
- * Excessive bottom cleaning; if your pet appears to be washing its bottom more than usual, this may be down to itching caused by a worm infection.

It is important to remember that, in many cases your pet may have none of these symptoms and still have a worm infection. Usually the worms will remain hidden in your pet's gut and they will not be visible in your pet's poo.

A yucky fact: Some types of adult female worms can produce 30,000 eggs per day and some worms can grow to a staggering length of 5m inside your pet!

Worm hot spots:

Dogs love to have a sniff of each other in the park, but did you know that dog-to-dog contact can transmit roundworm (through eggs from in their coats), fleas and subsequently tapeworm!

Just one pile of dog poo can contain a million roundworm eggs! We know that you are a responsible pet owner as you are reading this, but did you know that even if you scoop the poop, eggs can still remain in the left overs and could even go on to affect humans: yuk! Once it starts to break down, poo from an infected animal-including your own pet-blends into the soil. Here worm eggs can lay dormant for over a year and accidentally be swallowed by your pet. Only regular worming can break this life cycle.

Mice, birds and even sheep either caught or discovered by your pet can present a risk. This is because worm eggs or worm larvae can be found in these animals, which your pet may find and feed on.

Mice and small rodents act as an "intermediate" host for the 'flea' tapeworm. Sounds a bit scientific, but in a nutshell, if your cat regularly brings you a 'present'-you need regular tapeworm control!

Does your cat sit and salivate as birds merrily play in your garden? Cats love to hunt birds, but did you know that cats can pick up round worm by eating birds that have swallowed parasite eggs?

Your garden can be a haven for worm “carriers” such as slugs and snails. Plus if there’s poo on the ground, this could be harbouring roundworm eggs! Remember, even if you scoop the poop, the eggs can remain in the soil and be washed all over the place by rain. Monthly worming is routinely recommended to keep Roundworms at bay ensuring these parasite’s eggs do not end up on your shoes, and in your house!

How to protect your pet and family:

- * Use a quality, effective “allwormer” regularly (every 3 months)
- * Control fleas on your pet (tapeworm is passed on by fleas)
- * Remove droppings from the backyard regularly (should be daily)
- * Change cat litter trays daily
- * Wash your hands after playing with your pet
- * Avoid letting your pet lick your face
- * Do not feed raw meat or offal to your pets
- * Keep kennels clean
- * Keep sandpits covered
- * Pick up your pets droppings from public places, such as park and beaches to stop parasites from spreading.