



## Parasites and Pests

External and internal parasites - many with complex, hard-to-fight life cycles, constantly challenge the health of your dog or cat, whether it is an indoor or outdoor pet.

**Your veterinarian monitors and controls parasites through regular examinations, tests and treatment.**

### Heartworm Disease:

Heartworm is a parasitic disease that can affect any dog or cat regardless of age, sex or habitat. Heartworms live in the heart and lungs of an infected animal. The disease can lead to heart failure and death. Heartworm disease is spread by mosquitoes and therefore tends to have a higher incidence in areas heavily populated by mosquitoes. Dogs are considered the most common host for heartworms, however heartworms may also infect cats.

### Roundworms:

Roundworms are very common internal parasites. They live in the intestines and feed on partially digested food. Cats continue to be susceptible to infection throughout their life, whereas some dogs develop a resistance. In pregnant animals, dormant larvae are stimulated to migrate to the unborn, resulting in healthy mothers producing heavily parasitized young. In humans, roundworms can cause a serious condition known as visceral larva migrans. Proper hand washing can prevent infection. Deworming of puppies and preventive medication will reduce environmental contamination.

### Hookworms:

Hookworms latch onto the intestinal wall and feed on blood and tissue. Hookworms can infect a pet at any age but are life-threatening to the very young. Hookworm infection occurs through eating contaminated soil, drinking milk from an infected mother or by infective larvae burrowing into the skin of the paw. Human infection can occur when larvae in contaminated soil penetrate the skin. In humans, hookworm larvae do not migrate to the intestines as they do in pets. Instead, they move around under the skin and eventually die causing an inflammatory skin reaction known as cutaneous larva migrans, or "creeping eruptions."

### Tapeworms:

Adult tapeworms anchor to the wall of the small intestine by hooks or suckers. They use an intermediate host (rodents/ birds) for part of their development. The final host, your pet, eats the contaminated prey and the tapeworm can complete its life cycle. Pets can also become infected when they ingest fleas or biting lice carrying the larval form of the tapeworm. Pets do not develop resistance to tapeworms and are readily reinfected. Segments of the worms may be found in the feces, or in the pet's coat. Humans can be the intermediate host for some tapeworms. Cysts are formed in different organs which can cause a variety of diseases.

### Whipworms:

Whipworm infection is caused by direct ingestion of eggs in contaminated food or soil. Pets of all ages can be easily infected. Whipworm eggs can survive extreme climatic or environmental conditions and can remain alive in the environment for years.

**Be safe,  
not sorry**

**Can you catch heartworm and  
other parasites from your pet?**

Parasitic infections that can be transmitted from animals to humans, known as parasitic zoonoses, are rare.

Children are more prone to contracting zoonotic parasites as they tend to kiss and play more readily with pets. Parasite larvae are shed in the pet's feces and may contaminate soil and sand. When children play in the contaminated areas and place their fingers in their mouths, eggs can be ingested, causing infection. Hookworm larvae are capable of infecting a host through penetration of the skin. Be sure to pick up feces promptly and avoid eating while playing with your pet. Frequent hand washing, as well as good general hygiene for people and their pets is recommended.

Mosquitoes transmit heartworm, not pets. Humans are unnatural hosts for heartworm therefore cases of infection are rare. Many heartworm preventative medicines for pets do eliminate other parasites such as hookworms, whipworms and roundworms, which are more commonly seen in humans.

Routine checkups by your veterinarian - including a diagnostic test for intestinal worms and heartworm, as well as a physical exam along with medical prevention, will not only keep your dog healthy but will reduce any risk to you and your family.

Ask your veterinarian about keeping your pet and family safe from parasites. Your veterinarian will give you recommendations on deworming and required vaccinations.