



## Intestinal Parasites and Deworming

### St. Michael Veterinary Clinic

Parasites like roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms, and whipworms are common health issues for dogs and cats throughout most of the United States. Your pet may have intestinal parasites if it has been exposed to an environment susceptible to these parasites. Exposing a puppy or kitten to an infected mother prior to birth or during weaning can also cause infection. In either case, your pet may show no signs of infection.

You may not recognize any illness or see obvious symptoms until it is too late. Parasite eggs are shed by animals, even by those that appear to be well and energetic. A nationwide study revealed more than 1 out of 3 untreated dogs were infected with worms, almost all puppies less than 3 months old are infected with roundworms.

To protect your pet from intestinal parasites, you should have your pet examined regularly by your veterinarian. The veterinarian will recommend a screening test for parasites to be performed once yearly or more often, depending on your pet's lifestyle and risk factors. Your pet should also be dewormed on a regular schedule.

#### **Roundworms:**

Roundworms are active in the intestines of puppies, kittens, and adults. Puppies and kittens often have a pot-bellied appearance and poor growth. The worms may be seen in vomit or stool. When a client is concerned about their pet having worms, they note seeing a spaghetti-like worm. Almost all puppies and kittens are born with roundworms because the larvae can encyst in body tissue of adult bitches and activate during the last stages of pregnancy. We recommend that every puppy and kitten should be dewormed at 2,4,6,8 weeks of age and every month thereafter. Animals can get infected by ingesting feces of a carrier/fecal contaminated environment.

#### **Hookworms:**

These are small, thin worms that fasten to the wall of the small intestine and suck blood. Dogs and cats get hookworms if they come in contact with the larvae in contaminated soil or by eating infected stool. Just like roundworms, puppies and kittens can also get hookworms through the uterus and from their mother's milk. Typical signs include diarrhea, weight loss, anemia, and progressive weakness.

#### **Tapeworms:**

Tapeworms are transmitted to dogs and cats who ingest fleas or who hunt and eat wildlife infested with tapeworms or fleas. Dogs and cats will shed segments of the tapeworm containing the eggs in its feces. These segments are flat and move about shortly after

excretion. They look like grains of rice when dried and can be found either in the animal's stool or stuck to the hair around its anus.

### **Whipworms:**

Whipworms are found in dogs and cats and often look like pieces of thread with one end enlarged. They live in the large intestines of the dog and cat. These worms are hard to reveal on stool exam. Animals can get these parasites by ingesting infected stool/contaminated environment. They can survive in the environment for several years.

### **Zoonosis**

Intestinal parasites of animals can be transmitted to people, causing health issues. The term for this transmission is zoonosis. Transmission occurs through accidental oral ingestion of parasite eggs, infected fleas or by penetration of the skin by parasite larvae (hookworms only). Parents should be aware of these parasitic diseases because young children are especially at risk. Children are often less careful about hygiene, more likely to put their hands in their mouths and commonly play in dirt, grass, or sand. Intestinal parasite eggs and larvae are virtually everywhere in the environment and can survive in the soil for years, waiting to infest pets or people. Some species thrive in warm climates while others proliferate in colder regions. Therefore, routine deworming and preventive steps are so important.