**Pets & Parasites**

Dogs and cats aren’t just pets; they are treated as members of your family. Like any other member of the family, we want to keep your companion animal parasite free. It is fairly common for animals to become infected with a parasite at some point in their life. Below are the most common parasites to be aware of.

**Roundworms**

Roundworms are the most common of the parasitic worms found inside a pet. Almost all cats become infected with them at some point in their lives, usually as kittens. Roundworms may be contracted in different ways, making them easy to spread and hard to control.

Your cat may be infected with roundworms from the time he/she was born because the mother can often pass the worms to the puppy/kitten while it is still in her body. Roundworms can also develop in a kitten after it is born if the puppy/kitten eats larvae eggs from the environment or drinks worm larvae (young worms) in the mother’s milk. Another way roundworms are passed is when roundworm larvae are present in tissues of a mouse or another small mammal, and the puppy/kitten east the animal.

Adult roundworms live in the affected pet’s intestines. Many pets do not have signs of infection; however a cat with major roundworm infections, especially kittens, may have diarrhea, vomiting, weight loss, dull hair and a potbellied appearance. The pet may cough if the roundworms move into the lungs.

You may notice the adult roundworms in your pet’s feces or vomit. They will appear white or light brown in color and may be several inches long.

Because roundworms can enter your pet’s body in many different ways, it is essential to keep your pet’s living area clean, remove feces regularly, and if possible, prevent your pet from eating wild animals that may carry roundworms.

Roundworms do pose a significant risk to humans. Contact with contaminated soil or pet feces can result in human ingestion and infection. Roundworm eggs may accumulate in significant numbers in the soil where pets deposit feces. Once infected, the worms can cause eye, lung and neurologic symptoms in people.

**Whipworms**

Whipworms reside in the cecum, which is inside your pet’s body where the small intestine and large intestine meet. Cats become infected with whipworms by swallowing infective whipworm eggs in soil or other substances that may contain feces. Pets that are infected with a few whipworms may not have any signs of infection. More severe infections can cause bloody diarrhea. If an infected pet is not treated, then severe whipworm infection can cause serious disease and even death.

Whipworm infections can be prevented by removing your pet’s feces regularly from your yard & litterbox. Because whipworms are sometimes more difficult to diagnose than other intestinal parasites, it is important that we conduct an annual fecal examination (a test of your pet’s feces). Other kinds of worms that pets can get include heartworms, hookworms, roundworms and tapeworms.

**Coccidia**

Coccidia are tiny single-celled parasites that live in the wall of your pet’s intestine. They are found more often in puppies & puppies/kittens, but can infect older dogs and cats. Pets become infected by swallowing soil that contains coccidian or other substances in the environment that may contain feces.

Coccidiosis, the disease caused by coccidian, may not cause any signs in dogs and cats but is usually more serious in puppies and kittens. The most common sign of Coccidiosis is diarrhea. More severe infections can cause bloody diarrhea. Severe infections, especially in puppies & kittens, can be fatal.

Coccidial infections can be prevented by removing your pet’s feces regularly from the yard or other living quarters and places your pet goes to the bathroom. Because Coccidian are found most often in puppies and kittens, it is important to perform a fecal test to diagnose Coccidiosis. It is important that we conduct a fecal examination **annually** to make sure they have not contracted an infection.

**Giardia**

Giardia is a single-celled parasite that lives in your pet’s intestine. It can infect older pets, but more often infections occur in puppies and kittens. Cats can become infected when they swallow Giardia that may be present in water or other substances that have been soiled with feces. Many pets infected with Giardia do not get any disease. Giardiasis, the disease is caused by Giardia infection, usually results in diarrhea. Having Giardiasis for a long time can cause weight loss, vomiting, poor condition and even death.

The best way to prevent Giardia infection is to make sure that your pet has safe, clean drinking water. It is important not to allow pets to drink water from areas where other animals have left their feces. To prevent spreading Giardia (and other parasites), you should pick up the feces left by your pet immediately and place it in the trash. Be sure to avoid contact with the feces by using gloves, a bag over your hand, or a scooping device.

Giardia is a common cause of diarrhea in people, but canine/feline Giardia is not generally considered to spread from animals to humans.

**Hookworms** \*For Dogs\*

The hookworm attaches to the lining of the intestinal wall and feeds on your dog’s blood. Its eggs are ejected into the digestive tract and pass into the environment through your dog’s feces. Larvae (young hookworms) that hatch from hookworm eggs live in the soil. These larvae can infect your dog simply through contact and penetration of the skin and through the dog eating the larvae when they ingest dirt or during their routine licking (cleaning).

Hookworms such blood and therefore cause internal blood loss. They are a serious threat to dog s, especially young puppies that may not survive the blood loss without transfusions. In older animals, the blood loss may be more chronic, and the pet may have diarrhea and show weight loss.

It is essential to keep your dog’s surroundings clean and prevent the dog from being in contaminated areas. Most monthly heartworm preventatives include a drug to prevent and treat infections. This means that additional deworming medications are usually not required if the dog is reliably treated with a heartworm preventative.

Some hookworms of dog s can infect humans by penetrating the skin. This is most likely to occur when walking barefoot outside, working in the garden, or other areas where pets may deposit feces. Infection usually results in an itching sensation at the point where the larvae entered the skin, as well as visible tracks on the skin. The condition is easily treated, but can cause mild to extreme discomfort in the affected person. One species of hookworm that infects dog s is known to develop in the human intestine too, there it may cause disease.

**Ticks**

Ticks attach to your pet by inserting their mouthparts into your pet’s skin. Many ticks also produce a sticky, glue-like substance that helps them remain attached. After attaching to your pet, they begin feeding on your pet’s blood. The places where ticks attach can become red and irritated. Although rare, ticks can consume enough of your pet’s blood to cause a deficiency called anemia. Certain female ticks can also cause a rare paralysis in pets as a result of a toxin they produce while feeding. More importantly, ticks are capable of causing many diseases in your pet. The disease with which most people are familiar is called Lyme Disease. Other diseases caused by ticks are Anaplasma, Erlichia and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

To remove a tick, you should grasp the tick with tweezers as close to your cat’s skin as possible, but make sure not to pinch his/her skin. Then, pull the tick out using a straight, steady motion. Be gentle – pulling too hard on the tick can cause its head to remain lodged in your pet’s skin, which can lead to inflammation and secondary infection. Lastly, you should dispose of the tick by throwing it into a fire or by squishing it in a tissue using the tweezers and flushing it down the toilet. After removing the tick, thoroughly clean the bite area with rubbing alcohol, iodine scrub, or soap and water. If you find a tick attached to your dog, call us immediately and make an appointment to have us perform a blood test which will be done 6 weeks after the incident. This will determine if your dog has contracted a tick-borne disease.

The best way to prevent ticks from attaching to your dog is by regular use of tick control. If you have a tick problem in your yard, consider treating the outdoor environment (be sure to understand which products you are using and how they will affect the environment). Making a landscape change to make the environment less tick friendly and ridding your yard of wild animals. This can be done by providing a three foot buffer between the lawn and wooded areas – mulch, wood chips, or gravel work as well, and help decrease migration of ticks into yards). The skin where ticks attach to humans can become red and irritated. Ticks that transmit diseases to your dog can also transmit many or the same diseases to humans.

Did you know?

* Adult ticks can live up to 3 years without a blood meal.
* Ticks live on 3 different animals throughout their lifetime.
* Ticks spend most of their life OFF the host animal in the environment.
* Ticks can’t jump and don’t “fall from trees” as most people think, but transfer onto hosts when animals or humans walk through long grass, bushes, or brush.