



SWVH April NEWSLETTER:

Intestinal Parasites in Dogs and Cats

Parasite: organism living on or in another, usually larger, host organism in a way that harms or is of no advantage to the host.

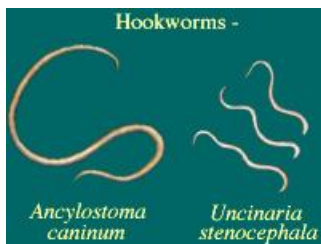
Dogs and cats commonly are affected by internal parasites (roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms, giardia) – some of which can also infect people (zoonotic). This newsletter is designed to help you learn about intestinal parasites – how we can diagnosis, treat and prevent.

Roundworms (*Toxocara*, *Toxascaris*)

- Dogs and cats can become infected with roundworms by eating infective worm eggs from the soil, by nursing or by eating a rodent that is carrying developing worms.
- Adult roundworms (up to seven inches long) live in the intestines and typically cause diarrhea and vomiting – but can also cause pneumonia in dogs and cats as large numbers of immature worms are migrating through the body.
- When roundworms infect people (zoonotic) the condition is called visceral larva migrans. Children are inadvertently infected by consuming worm eggs in the soil.



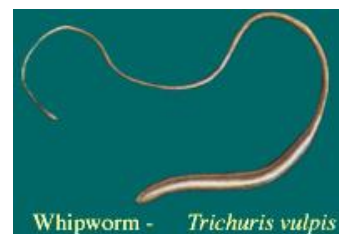
Hookworms (*Ancylostoma*, *Uncinaria*)



- Dogs are infected with hookworms, typically not cats. The infective larva can penetrate a dog's skin or be ingested while grooming.
- Adult hookworms suck blood from the lining of the intestines and can cause anemia (low red blood cell count) and diarrhea.
- Hookworms are also considered zoonotic because the infective larva can also penetrate human's skin leading to visceral larva migrans.

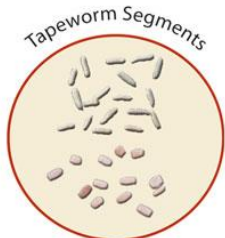
Whipworms (*Trichuris*)

- Dogs are infected with whipworms after ingestion of infective eggs from the environment.
- The large intestine is where the two-inch blood-sucking adult whipworms are found.
- People have not been found to be infected by whipworms.



Tapeworms (*Dipylidium*, *Taenia*)

- Dogs and cats are infected with tapeworms after they ingest an intermediate host (fleas or rodents).
 - Adult tapeworms live in the small intestines and their eggs are passed by the pet in packets (segments) that can be seen around the tail and are about the size of a grain of rice.
 - People could become infected if they ingest a flea or infected rodent.



Protozoan (*Giardia*)

- Giardia is passed to dogs and cats usually through giardia-cyst contaminated water.
- Microscopic adult giardia (flagellates) lives in the intestines and causes diarrhea.
- People can become infected (zoonotic) by ingestion of the giardia cysts – hand washing and prompt pet waste disposal is important to prevent human infection.



Treatment

Often when a dog or cat has diarrhea, Dr. Rasmusson or Dr. Sargent will recommend a fecal test to try to identify if any intestinal parasites are contributing.

There are different oral deworming medications to treat the different kind of intestinal parasites. A follow-up fecal test is recommended two weeks after treatment is completed to make sure the infection is completely resolved.

Exposure

Most of the internal parasites dogs and cats are exposed to are by infective eggs and/or larva in the environment. Many of the eggs and larva are designed to survive heat, freezing and sunlight for months or even years. The most effective way to decrease environmental exposure is to pick up and dispose of feces as soon as they are produced.

Reno is lucky to have a more difficult climate for parasitic eggs and larva survival (opposed to Atlanta or San Francisco). But as pets travel with us and pets are bought from all over the country – they can bring intestinal parasites with them to Reno.

Annual Fecal Test

Dr. Sargent and Dr. Rasmusson recommend an annual fecal test to check for intestinal parasites eggs, which will allow us to treat your pet before clinical signs appear. We send our fecals to a lab where a fecal centrifugation test is performed and results received the next business day. Recently there have been a number of dogs diagnosed with giardia at SWVH, indicating that local contaminated waters are the source for our patients' infections.

Zoonotic Prevention

An important part of preventing these intestinal parasites from infecting people is to teach children to wash their hands after petting a dog or cat and especially before they eat. Monthly heartworm preventatives also have active ingredients to treat for roundworm and hookworms which is recommended by the CDC to help prevent zoonotic spread to people. Covering sandboxes and removing pet fecal material from our lawns will also help decrease the possibility of people contacting infective eggs and larva in the soil.

SWVH is here to help and we would love to answer any of your questions and concerns. Look for SWVH's next newsletter about another parasite – Heartworm.

Sincerely,

The Doctors and Staff of SWVH

SWVH is proud to be AAHA-accredited

