



MANOR
VETERINARY CLINIC

Worms and Ticks



What they are and what to do about them

Worms

All pets will be affected by worms at some stage in their life and many will be re-infected unless they are given regular worming treatments. Except in rare cases worms are unlikely to cause serious harm, but as regular treatment is relatively simple and inexpensive it is recommended to treat - especially as some types of worms can be passed on to humans.

There are two important types parasitic worms in dogs and cats - roundworms and tapeworms. As their name suggests, roundworms are round like string, whereas tapeworms are flat like ribbons. These live in the intestine, along with smaller worms called hookworms and whipworms which are rarely seen in this country except in kennelled dogs.

What damage do worms cause?

Intestinal worms feed off the food in your pet's gut making them hungrier and can cause blood loss. Worms can also cause diarrhoea, dehydration and anaemia making your pet run-down and more susceptible to other diseases. Heavy worm infestations can cause a cough, weight loss, dry coat and "pot-bellied" appearance. Worm infestations are more serious in puppies and kittens, leading to poor growth and sometimes death if a large number of worms causes a blockage in the intestine.

There is a type of roundworm called *Angiostrongylus* which can live in blood vessels and cause lung disease, heart disease and blood clotting problems. It is more common in the South and West of England but is being diagnosed in Kent. Other worms can live in the lungs (*Aelurostrongylus* in cats and *Filaroides* in dogs) and may cause coughing. The heartworm, *Dirofilaria*, is not found in this country but if you are travelling abroad with your pet then check if your destination has heartworm in the area so that you may begin preventative treatment.

How are worms passed on?

Each species of worm has its own specific life cycle. Most worms are passed in the faeces (droppings) and require being eaten by another animal to infect the gut again.

Roundworms live as adults in the intestine of dogs and cats, laying eggs which are passed in the faeces. The eggs can survive in the environment for months or years in the soil. They can also be very sticky so an animal can re-infect itself by licking eggs on their own coat. They can be passed on directly through the faeces or through the tissues of another animal such as a rodent, bird or slug which is eaten by a pet. Some roundworms are passed on directly from the dam to puppy or kitten either in pregnancy or through milk.

Tapeworms grow as a continuous ribbon in the intestine, anchored by their heads. Segments packed with eggs break off and are passed out. The segments look like grains of rice and may wriggle like a maggot before drying up. The most common tapeworm is passed on via fleas, but there are also tapeworms which uses rodents and rabbits to complete their life-cycles and are passed on when a cat or dog eats an infected animal.

How can I tell if my pet has worms?

Most of the time, it will be hard to tell if your pet has worms. Apart from the signs of ill health mentioned above, you may occasionally see tapeworm segments on your pet's fur or faeces. Adult roundworms are rarely passed in the faeces and the only way to tell is to examine faeces under the microscope and look for eggs.

Can people catch worms?

The common roundworm found in dogs, *Toxocara canis*, is a rare but potentially serious cause of human disease. The equivalent worm in cats also has the potential to cause human disease but this is much rarer. The *Toxocara* larvae can burrow through the gut into body and cause serious damage if they become stuck somewhere, such as the eye. There are occasional reports of the victim, usually a child, being blinded in one eye. As well as regularly worming your pets, it is important to clean up faeces regularly and to make sure children wash their hands after playing in open areas which may have been used as a toilet by dogs or cats. Hookworms can cause skin disease as the larvae migrate through the skin. This is extremely rare in England, but may happen when walking barefoot on areas contaminated by dog droppings. Some tapeworms can cause disease in people but in these cases the dog serves to spread infection to sheep or other animals and humans become affected when eating infected meat.

How do I treat worms?

Roundworms can be treated using a broad spectrum wormer, such as **Milbemax**, **Panacur** or **Profender** spot-on for cats. Some spot on products, such as **Advocate**, will treat against roundworms as well as fleas.

Tapeworms can be treated with the broad spectrum wormers such as **Milbemax** or **Profender** as above. If your cat has a monthly spot-on to treat roundworms, you should treat with **Droncit** spot-on for tapeworms.

The products used to treat worms usually do not have a persistent effect, so the treatments will need to be repeated as animals can be re-infected. Animals are usually treated every 3-6 months, but this may be more frequent in animals that hunt or scavenge and less frequent in animals that don't go out e.g. indoor cats.

If your dog is travelling abroad, tapeworm treatment is required 1-5 days before departure to the UK. This is for *Echinococcus*, a tapeworm which can cause serious human disease.

Ticks

Ticks are blood sucking parasites which climb on to animals to feed. They can often be mistaken for a wart or growth. Most ticks found on dogs and cats are sheep and deer ticks.

When a tick is attached and feeding, the skin around them reacts and becomes sore, sometimes becoming infected. A skin reaction may form even after the tick is removed (tick granuloma).

Ticks can also transmit diseases, such as Lyme's disease, which is present in the UK. This causes disease in people as well as animals and the symptoms include fever, stiffness, poor appetite and enlarged lymph glands.

When travelling abroad with your pets, it is important to know that there are other tick-bourne parasites which can cause serious disease, especially in dogs. Ehrlichiosis can cause bleeding and suppress the immune system making dogs more susceptible to infection and Babesiosis can cause serious disease with anaemia and occasionally death.

Diseases are transmitted from the tick's mouthparts after about 48-72 hours, so it is important to kill or remove a tick before it has a chance to transmit disease.

Avoid tick habitats if possible - these are usually damp, grassy areas in the countryside and ticks are more common in late summer and autumn.

If you are in area that you know has ticks or are travelling abroad, you should use a product such as **Frontline**, **Advantix** or **Scalibor**.

Always check your pet regularly for ticks and remove any you find using a specially designed tick remover (such as the **O'Tom Tick Twister**) as these reliably remove the mouthparts and prevent any ongoing inflammation or disease transmission.



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