



WORMS AND YOUR DOG

This fact sheet gives a general overview of the problem.

Are there different sorts of worms?

Broadly there are two types of worms that cause problems in the dog, Nematodes (roundworms), and Cestodes (tapeworms). Common nematodes are *Toxocara canis* (intestinal roundworm) and *Diarofilaria immitis*, the heart worm. Important Cestode parasites include *Dipylidium caninum*, *Taenia* species and *Echinococcus* species. Hookworms (*Ancylostoma* species), are also occasionally encountered.

Are these endoparasitic infections serious in the dog?

In adult dogs intestinal worms, both roundworms and tapeworms, are usually not life threatening, except in seriously debilitated dogs or those that are immuno- compromised.

Heartworm disease

This is a condition which is increasingly being diagnosed in Great Britain probably as a result of the relaxation of quarantine restrictions allowing British dogs to travel to areas such as southern Europe and certain parts of the USA (e.g. Florida) where the causal organism, *Diarofilaria*, is prevalent. Heartworm disease is considered to be one of the most important conditions seen in small animal practice in the United States.

Transmission depends upon mosquito types only recently found in parts of Britain, possibly associated with milder conditions.

Roundworms

No intermediate host is required.

Nematodes (roundworms) are free living in the bowel. In puppies they can present problems if not controlled. In large numbers they can stunt growth, cause serious digestive upsets and result in a lot of gas formation. This results in a typical 'pot bellied' appearance. Roundworms can be spread directly from dog to dog via infective eggs.

Tapeworms

An intermediate host is required.

Dipylidium caninum is the common tapeworm of the dog in the UK. It causes few problems in the adult host but in the growing puppy can result in digestive upsets and stunting. *Dipylidium* is spread by the flea as intermediate host and effective treatment also must cover environmental flea eradication.

Echinococcus spp, another type of tapeworm, is important because it is zoonotic, i.e. we can be infected. Sheep and sometimes man can act as the intermediate hosts in which the immature forms of *Echinococcus* develop inside cysts which grow in various organs. In man the usual organs affected are lungs or brain.

Control measures involving regular deworming of the dog together with avoidance of feeding raw or under-cooked offal are obvious precautions.

Tapeworms found in adult dogs usually cause few problems. However occasionally puppies are infested and depending on the type of worm involved, their sheer volume can cause serious blockages to the bowel.

Hookworms

Hookworms, particularly *Ancylostoma spp* are one of the most pathogenic parasites of the dog. Although not a major problem in British dogs, it attaches itself to the lining of the bowel and as a result of blood sucking activities can cause severe anaemia. The infective larvae enter the host either by mouth or through the skin (particularly of the feet). Eczema and secondary bacterial infection can result due to irritation as they burrow through the skin.

As a result of increased foreign travel by British dogs under the Pets Passport Scheme, hookworm disease is being more regularly diagnosed in Britain.

Heartworms

These are a major problem in parts of southern Europe and the United States. They are large worms, adults reaching 16 cm (5½ in). They are chiefly located in the right ventricle of the heart and adjacent blood vessels. As mentioned previously heart worm disease is considered to be one of the most important conditions seen in small animal practice in the United States. It is now being diagnosed in the UK with increasing frequency.

The period of development to the adult stage is about six months after infection following a bite by a mosquito carrying the infective larvae (*Microfilariae*). The typical signs are fatigue on exercise, coughing and poor condition.

Treatment against worms

Today many effective drugs are available to control worms in the dog which should be obtained from your veterinary surgeon. Effective worm control involves the choice of an appropriate preparation which has to be regularly repeated. At Chaseview we recommend **Milbemax** every 3 months for both cats and dogs. Please contact us and we will be happy to advise and supply a suitable preparation together with appropriate dosing instructions.