

Intestinal Parasites

Intestinal parasites are very common and can threaten your pet's health, as well as your own. Large numbers can cause intestinal blockage, bloody diarrhea and even premature death in young or weakened animals. Some types, particularly roundworms, can infect you and your family, causing serious and permanent damage.

Parasitic **infections** in animals can occur in several ways: by ingestion of a flea, through nursing or through the placenta, via ingestion of small birds or mammals, or via contact with infected animals or their droppings. Many puppies and kittens are infected early on through contact with their mother.

Symptoms may include anemia (decreased red blood cells), diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite, weight loss, constipation, coughing, a pot belly and poor haircoat. Tapeworm pieces look like white rice stuck around the animal's anal area.

Diagnosis is made by microscopic exam of a small sample of your pet's stool to look for parasite eggs. Retesting may be necessary after treatment. A negative test does not necessarily mean that the animal is free from parasites, so your veterinarian may recommend repeat testing if suspicious of infection.

Treatment varies according to the type of parasite(s) present, but is usually oral. Annual treatment may be needed for some animals, such as cats that hunt regularly. **Prevention is important.** Remove stool from the yard promptly. Control fleas, and if your cat hunts have it tested and dewormed regularly. Control your pet's access to the droppings of other animals as much as possible, and have your pet's stool checked annually by your veterinarian for early detection and treatment.