Intestinal Parasites: A Severe Health Threat to Dogs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Dogs can host several intestinal parasites that can severely affect their health, and could also infect you and your family. The most common intestinal parasites that infect dogs are species of roundworms and hookworms. Dogs can also acquire whipworms and tapeworms, but these are less common.

Dogs can get roundworms from eating infected feces or prey, and infected mothers can pass roundworm larvae to their pups across the placenta or through their milk as they nurse. Dogs become infected with hookworms by ingesting larvae from a contaminated environment, eating infected prey, or by larval penetration of the skin. If the dam is infected, puppies can become infected as they nurse.

ROUNDWORMS

Roundworms live in a dog's intestines, where they absorb nutrients from ingested food, interfere with digestion, and can damage the lining of the intestine. Animals with mild infestations of roundworms may not show any signs of disease. More severe infestations may cause weight loss, a dull hair coat, and a pot-bellied appearance. Puppies may become anemic and have vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation. Rarely, in severe infestations, roundworms can cause intestinal obstruction. Coughing may occur as the larvae migrate through the respiratory system.

HOOKWORMS

Hookworms attach themselves to the intestinal wall and feed on the dog's blood. This can rapidly cause anemia. Dogs suffering from a heavy hookworm infestation may have pale gums, weakness, and black, tarry stools. Vomiting, diarrhea, lackluster haircoat, and stunted growth may also occur. In severe infestations, the hookworm larvae migrating through the lungs can cause coughing or pneumonia. Untreated hookworm infestations can result in death, especially in puppies.

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DEWORMING – simple, effective and essential

Regular deworming of dogs, as recommended by the American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists (AAVP), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC), is vital to protecting both canine and human health. If you've recently acquired a puppy, obtain her deworming history and contact your veterinarian to determine whether additional deworming is needed. In addition to regular deworming, schedule annual fecal examinations with your veterinarian. Also, keep your yard and home environment free of feces, which can harbor parasites that sicken both pets and people.

Used year round, monthly heartworm preventives that contain an ingredient to control roundworms and hookworms can decrease the risk of these parasites infecting your dog.

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