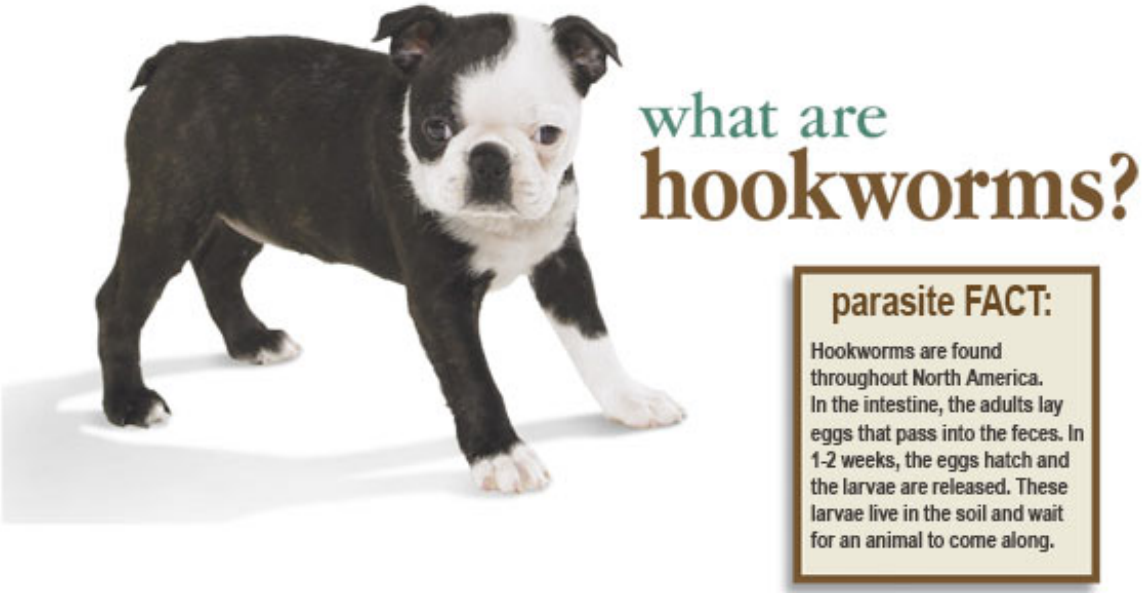
Hookworms in Dogs: Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Hookworms are one of the most common intestinal parasites of dogs and cats (especially puppies and kittens), and can cause life-threatening disease, like severe anemia, and serious diarrhea.

HOW DOES MY DOG GET HOOKWORMS?

There are three ways an animal may become infected:

1 **THROUGH THE SKIN:**
Larvae entering through the skin migrate through the bloodstream to the lungs and trachea, and are coughed up and swallowed. They attach themselves to the intestinal wall and consume the dog's blood from the tiny vessels of the wall, thus completing the life cycle.

2 **THROUGH INGESTION:**
Larvae may be ingested through contaminated sources in the environment or from prey animals. Most larvae that are ingested usually pass down to the intestine, where they remain. A few, however, may migrate through the body and ultimately to the trachea where they are coughed up and swallowed. Some larvae will stop their migration midway and encyst in muscles.

3 **THROUGH THE UTERUS OR MILK:**
Larvae that encyst in the muscle can subsequently migrate to the uterus of a pregnant animal and infect the fetuses. They can also migrate to the mammary glands of a lactating female and infect the nursing young.

SYMPTOMS OF HOOKWORM

By feeding on the oxygen-carrying blood of the host, hookworms can rapidly cause anemia. The mucous membranes, e.g. gums, will appear pale, the animal will become weak, and sometimes black, tarry stools can be seen. Growth in young animals is stunted, and the haircoat may appear dull and dry.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is made by finding the eggs in the feces. In very young animals, severe disease may be present before the adult worms have started to lay eggs. Diagnosis must then be made by evaluating the signs of disease.

TREATMENT

Treatment consists of using the appropriate wormers, such as PROWormer-2® or Nemex-2. Puppies and kittens should be treated every 2 weeks for a total of 3 treatments. Certain prescription heartworm preventives such as Heartgard® Plus, Tri-Heart® Plus, Sentinel®, and Revolution® will also kill hookworms.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

Many times, supportive care must be given along with the hookworm treatment, including high-protein diets and iron supplements. In severe cases, blood transfusions may be necessary.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*