Whipworms in Dogs: Symptoms, Diagnosis, and Treatment

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WHIPWORMS ARE common in dogs and found throughout the United States. Whipworms get their name from the whip-like shape of the adult worms. The front portion of the worm is very thin (the whip) and the posterior end is thick (whip handle). Whipworms live in the large intestine and cecum. They are 2-3 inches long, but are very thin, and rarely seen in the feces.

HOW DOES MY PET GET WHIPWORMS?

A dog or cat becomes infected by ingesting food or water contaminated with whipworm eggs. The eggs are swallowed, hatch, and in three months, the larvae mature into adults in the large intestine where they burrow their mouths into the intestinal wall and feed on blood. Adult worms lay eggs that are passed in the feces. The eggs must remain in the soil for about a month to mature and be capable of causing infection.

DIAGNOSIS

An infection is diagnosed by a veterinarian finding eggs in the feces. The signs of infection vary with the number of worms in the intestine. A small number of worms will cause no visible signs, but larger numbers can result in inflammation of the intestinal wall. Large amounts of mucus are produced by the inflamed intestine. Sometimes bleeding into the intestine occurs, and anemia can result. Animals may have diarrhea and weight loss.

TREATMENT

Common wormers effective against whipworms include Panacur®, Safe-Guard® Granules, and Sentinel®, which is also a heartworm preventive. Sentinel® and Panacur® require a prescription while Safe-Guard® does not. Immature whipworms in the cecum or intestine are somewhat resistant to dewormers. For that reason, treatments often need to be repeated for several months, until all the larvae have matured into adults.

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