Creekside Animal Hospital

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INTESTINAL PARASITES

Dogs and cats can become hosts to many intestinal parasites and a few general statements apply to all parasitic infections:

- Diagnosis is usually made from a fresh stool sample or, in the case of tapeworms, seeing the segments in the stool. We use the most efficient detection method possible by centrifuging a sample to separate the parasite eggs so they can be seen on microscopic examination.
- Up to 98 % of puppies and kittens are infected before birth and, for this reason, will need deworming starting at 2-3 weeks of age.
- At this time there is no one dewormer that can eliminate all species of parasites. Consequently, an accurate diagnosis is necessary to treat your pet properly.
- Occasionally, for a heavy parasitic infection, 3 or even 4 treatments may be necessary to eliminate the parasite.

The following is a brief description of the common intestinal parasites with their symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, prevention, and mode of human transmission.

ROUNDWORMS:

Roundworms are a common parasite of puppies and kittens, but can be seen in any dog or cat. Diagnosis is made from a microscopic examination of the feces or from a description of the worm if it seen in the stool or vomitus. Symptoms will vary from none to vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal swelling. Transmission to adult dogs and cats occurs by infected feces of other animals. For dogs, some heartworm preventatives also prevent roundworm infection. Transmission to humans is possible; young children seem to be more commonly affected. **Roundworms are a human health concern.**

HOOKWORMS:

Hookworms are also a common parasite of puppies and kittens, but are seen with equal frequency in adult pets. This parasite sucks your pet's blood robbing them of nutrition and can cause severe anemia. Diagnosis is made from microscopic examination of your pet's stool. Symptoms will vary from none to blood in the stool (dark tar-colored stool) with diarrhea. Severe cases may need hospitalization and blood transfusion. Transmission to adults occurs by infected feces contaminating the grass and soil. Prevention, therefore, requires that the pet be kept away from contaminated soil areas. Some heartworm preventative can also prevent hookworm infections in dogs. Transmission to humans is possible and usually shows up as skin lesions.
Hookworms are a human health concern.

WHIPWORMS:

Whipworms affect dogs only. Diagnosis is also made from a microscopic exam of the feces. Eggs from this parasite pass intermittently, however, so it may be necessary to check multiple stool samples before a diagnosis is made. Symptoms vary from none to severe watery diarrhea, vomiting, and significant weight loss. Some dogs require hospitalization for treatment of dehydration, malnutrition, and infection. Whipworms can be difficult to eliminate because they can live for years in the soil after the initial infestation. There is no human transmission.

TAPEWORMS:

Tapeworms are a common parasite that affects both cats and dogs. Transmission occurs when your eats an infected flea or sometimes by eating an infected rodent. The tapeworm attaches to the intestine and begins to grow "segments". In about 3 weeks, these segments begin to pass in the stool. They are approximately ¼ to ½ inch long, flat, white, and resemble a grain of rice. After a short time in the air, they dry up to resemble a small, yellow flat seed. Diagnosis is made from seeing these segments in the stool or on the pet's back end rather than a microscopic fecal exam. Treatment is either by oral tablets or by an injection. Prevention is strict flea control and preventing the ingestion of rodents. Although humans can get tapeworms, there is no direct transmission from a dog or cat to a human.

GIARDIA:

Giardia is not a worm but a very tiny single-celled parasite that can live in the intestines of dogs, cats, and man. It is seen most commonly in dogs coming out of a kennel-type situation (pet stores, shelters, dog pounds, etc.) but its incidence is increasing. Symptoms include intermittent or continuous diarrhea, weight loss, depression, and loss of appetite. Diagnosis is made from a fresh stool specimen for optimum results. A surprising number of affected animals are "occult"; that is, they are infected but are negative on these tests even with multiple examinations. As a result, this parasite is often treated without confirming diagnosis. Treatment is an oral medication. Prevention involves careful disposal of all fecal material and cleaning contaminated areas. Humans can become infected with Giardia, so special care must be taken to be diligent with washing hands, bowls and utensils.

COCCIDIA:

Coccidia is also a single-celled parasite. It is seen primarily in puppies and kittens, although debilitated adults can also be affected. Transmission occurs by eating the infective stage of the parasite. It then reproduces in the intestinal tract causing no symptoms in mild cases to bloody diarrhea in severely affected pets. Diagnosis is made from a fresh stool sample. Treatment varies greatly. Animals showing no signs of illness are often not treated because a mild case is often self-limiting. Pets with diarrhea are treated with an oral medication. Severely affected pets may need hospitalization. Prevention involves disposal of all stools and cleaning the pet's living area. **Human transmission is uncommon, but can occur.**

Please call us at 770-889-4426 with questions.