



# PET HEALTH



## Parasite Prevention

### Heartworm

Heartworm is caused by a roundworm called *Dirofilaria Immitis* which lives in the bloodstream of infected animals. It is transmitted from animal to animal by a mosquito vector with juvenile worms taking 5-6 months to develop to adult worms in a dog or cat.

Adult worm burden can cause life threatening serious diseases with worms growing up to metres in length and potentially causing obstructions in vessels and even the heart.

Both dogs and cats can contract heartworm but clinical signs in cats are uncommon and worm burdens are generally lower than in dogs.

Treatment for heartworm is possible if detected early but can be dangerous as destroying worms in an animal's circulation can lead to other potentially life threatening complications.



The best way is to prevent heartworm before it occurs. This can either be via daily medication or monthly oral or spot-on applications or as an annual heartworm injection, often at the same time as their annual vaccination. If a dog hasn't had any heartworm prevention before a small blood test will often be required to make sure the prevention given doesn't cause any further complications if a worm burden is present.

### Intestinal Worms

There are four main worms which dogs and cats can carry:

- Roundworm
- Hookworm
- Whipworm
- Tapeworm

These worms live in the intestines of dogs and cats where adult worms produce eggs which are shed into the environment via faecal contamination. These eggs can then be ingested by any other animal

and mature to juvenile worm stages. In dogs and cats these juvenile worms can mature to adult worms to complete their life cycle but this does not happen in other species. In these non-host species, such as humans, the juvenile worms can migrate throughout the body and cause serious disease in several organs, including the brain, liver, kidneys and skin. Ingested tapeworm can also form cysts which can remain present in the body for years.

Regular worming of your dogs and cats is important to help minimise the worm burden in them as well as to decrease the human health risk. Every dog or cat needs intestinal worming every 3 months to help keep this worm burden as low as possible.

## **Fleas**

Fleas are external parasites that live in the coat of dogs and cats and can cause intense itching and irritation.

Adult fleas shed eggs into an animal's coat and into the environment. These eggs can remain dormant in the right environment for months or even years and then can become active in the ideal conditions. Warmer humid weather is ideal for fleas and they can even jump onto humans and cause itching and irritation.

Regular monthly flea treatment is the best way to prevent a flea burden from irritating your pets and your household. Topical spot on treatments are generally the most effective, and decontaminating an environment is also very important to help get a flea burden under control.

