**Glen Mills Veterinary Hospital**

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**GI PARASITES**

**What are worms (GI parasites) in cats and dogs?**

### GI parasites are organisms that can affect pets and trigger a wide range of clinical signs including:

* No symptoms
* Change in appetite
* Coughing
* Diarrhea (sometimes with blood)
* Weight loss
* Lethargy
* Vomiting
* Rough dry haircoat
* Anemia
* Weakness
* Some infections can even be fatal

**How does my cat or dog become affected?**

* Drinking contaminated water
* Contact with infected feces
* Contact with a contaminated environment
* Most puppies and kittens are exposed either before birth or from suckling
* Consuming an infected intermediate host (flea, worm, bird, rodent etc.)
* People and pets can also track the organisms indoors from the dirt on their shoes or feet.

**Can indoor-only pets become infected with GI parasites?**

Yes, as stated above, dirt and mud can act as a medium to bring in parasites, and even hunting indoor pests like mice can trigger a parasite problem.

**What are the most common organisms that can infect my pet?**

* Hookworms
* Whipworms
* Roundworms
* Tapeworms
* Coccidia
* Giardia

**What about heartworm?**

Heartworm is a worm that lives in the bloodstream and is transmitted by mosquito and it is discussed in a separate handout

**What are fecals? How do I obtain a sample? Why is running more than 1 sample recommend at times?**

Fecals are tests run to screen for intestinal parasites. Fresh stool samples that are collected within 6 hrs and that are still soft are best for analysis. Do not freeze the sample. Fecals look for microscopic eggs. It is uncommon to see adult worms just by looking at the feces and many species are only viewed microscopically. Because many parasites shed eggs intermittently, sometimes multiple fecals are required for diagnosis.

**How are GI worms treated?**

The heartworm preventative helps to combat *some* of the aforementioned parasites, in addition to prevention against heartworm, which is why we encourage administering this to your pet year round. In the face of an active infection we will administer a routine anti-parasitic medication. Sometimes we repeat a deworming several weeks later because the initial dose only kills the adult worms. Within 3-4 weeks, the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated.

If your dog is infected, realize that re-infection is possible from a patient’s own yard. Scoop the yard where your dog defecates frequently, ideally daily, as worm eggs and larvae are found in stool and can contaminate the environment.

**Can GI parasites affect people?**

Yes, people may be become infected from feces from an affected pet, or contaminated soil, sand or plant life. The eggs can be ingested and some types of parasites can even burrow through the skin. People can show no signs but in some cases the parasites can travel to internal organs and lead to blindness, organ failure or even death.

 It is thought that 30% to 50% of dogs and cats carry gastrointestinal (GI) parasites and that 1 to 3 million people in the U.S. have infections from the same parasites carried by pets.  Children, the elderly and immunocompromised people are at the highest risk.

**How can I prevent the risk of spreading parasites to the people in my family?**

1) Keep your dog on monthly heartworm preventative all year.  This medication helps to prevent hookworms and roundworms in your dog.

2) Scoop the yard where your dog defecates frequently, ideally daily, as worm eggs and larvae are found in stool and can contaminate the environment.

3) Bring your pet’s stool sample to our office during the recommended intervals.

4) Keep your cat on heartworm prevention once per month all year.  This medication eliminates hookworms and roundworms that could be potentially spread to humans in the household.  (It also kills fleas, which can be culprits in spreading “cat scratch fever”).

5) Ensure everyone in the family washes their hands before eating, especially if they have recently handled their pet.

6) Contact us if you have questions on how to keep your family safe!

**Where do I learn more about GI parasites?**

The CDC (Center for Disease Control) and CAPC (Companion Animal Parasite Council) recommend regular fecal testing and deworming and we feel they can offer a wealth of information if you would like to know more. Please see [www.capcvet.com](http://www.capcvet.com)