You, Your Dog, & Parasites

Dogs are not just pets. They are treated as members of the family. And like any member of your family, it's important to keep your companion animal healthy and free of parasites. At Broad Ripple Animal Clinic, we can accurately diagnose and safely treat parasites and other health problems that not only affect your dog, but also the safety of you and your family.

It is fairly common for a dog to become infected with an internal or external parasite at some point in its lifetime. Parasites can affect your dog in a variety of ways, ranging from simple irritation to causing life-threatening conditions if left untreated. Some parasites can infect and transmit diseases to people. By having your pet tested for parasites semi-annually, you can protect your dog and your family from potentially harmful parasites all year long.

**Roundworms in Dogs**

Roundworms are the most common of the parasitic worms found inside a dog. Almost all dogs become infected with them at some time in their lives, usually as puppies. Roundworms may be contracted in different ways, making them easy to spread and hard to control. Your dog may be infected with roundworms from the time it is born because often the mother passes the worms to the puppy while it is still in her body. Roundworms can also develop in a puppy after it is born when the puppy eats larvated eggs from the environment or drinks worm larvae (young worms) in the mother's milk. Another way roundworms are passed is when roundworm larvae are present in the tissues of a mouse or another small mammal and the puppy eats the animal.

How will roundworms affect my dog?
Adult roundworms live in the affected dog's intestines. Many dogs do not have signs of infection; however, dogs with major roundworm infections, especially puppies, show weight loss, dull hair, and a potbellied appearance. The dog may cough if the roundworms move into the lungs. You may notice the adult roundworms in your dog's feces or vomit. They will appear white or light brown in color and may be several inches long and often described as spaghetti.

How do I prevent my dog from getting roundworms?
Because roundworms can enter your dog's body in many different ways, it is essential to keep your dog's living area clean, remove feces regularly, and, if possible, prevent your dog from eating wild animals that may carry roundworms. To get rid of roundworms that are passed in the mother's milk, puppies should be treated at 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age and then receive a preventive treatment monthly. Fecal (stool) examinations should be conducted 2 to 4 times during the first year of life and 1 or 2 times each year in adults. Nursing mothers should be kept on monthly preventive and treated along with their puppies.

Can humans be harmed by roundworms?
Roundworms do pose a significant risk to humans. Contact with contaminated soil or feces can result in human ingestion and infection. Roundworm eggs may accumulate in significant numbers in the soil where pets deposit feces. Children should not be allowed to play where animals have passed feces. Individuals who have direct contact with soil should wear gloves or wash their hands immediately.

**Tapeworms in Dogs**

Tapeworms are long, flat worms that attach themselves to your dog's intestines. A tapeworm body consists of multiple parts, or segments, each with its own reproductive organs. Tapeworm infections are usually diagnosed by finding segments—which appear as small white worms that may look like grains of rice or seeds—on the rear end of your dog, in your dog's feces, or where your dog lives and sleeps.

How will tapeworms affect my dog?
Dogs with tapeworm infections usually are not sick and do not lose weight from the worms. Contrary to popular belief, dogs that "scoot" on their rear ends are generally doing it for reasons other than having tapeworms, such as blocked or irritated anal sacs (pouches located in your dog's rear end) or other skin inflammation of the rear.

How do I prevent my dog from getting tapeworms?
Try to keep your dog from coming in contact with intermediate hosts that contain tapeworm larvae. Because fleas are an intermediate host for the most common kind of tapeworm, consistent, safe, and effective flea control is an essential prevention measure.
Can humans be harmed by tapeworms?
Certain tapeworms found in dogs or cats may cause serious disease in humans. Fortunately, these tapeworms (Echinococcus species) are uncommon in the United States and are readily treated by prescriptions available from your doctor. There are rare reports of Dipylidium (a common tapeworm in pets) infections in children, but these infections are not associated with significant disease.

Whipworms in Dogs
The whipworm is one of the four most common intestinal parasites of dogs. Whipworms reside in the cecum, which is inside your dog’s body where the small intestine and large intestine meet. Dogs become infected with whipworms by swallowing infective whipworm eggs in soil or other substances that may contain dog feces.

How will whipworms affect my dog?
Dogs that are infected with a few whipworms may not have any signs of infection. More severe infections can cause bloody diarrhea. If an infected dog is not treated, then severe whipworm infection can cause serious disease and even death due to blood loss and dehydration, as a result of diarrhea.

How do I prevent my dog from getting whipworms?
Whipworm infections can be prevented by removing your dog’s feces regularly from your yard. Because whipworms are sometimes more difficult to diagnose than other intestinal parasites, it is important that you take your dog to see a veterinarian bi-annually for a properly conducted fecal examination (test of your dog’s feces).

Hookworms in Dogs
Hookworms are intestinal parasites that live in the digestive system of your dog. The hookworm attaches to the lining of the intestinal wall and feeds on your dog’s blood. Its eggs are ejected into the digestive tract and pass into the environment through your dog’s feces. Larvae (young hookworms) that hatch from hookworm eggs live in the soil and can infect your dog simply through contact with and penetration of the skin and through eating the hookworm larvae. It is common for hookworms to infect the host through a dog’s belly or feet as well as to be ingested during routine licking (cleaning).

How will hookworms affect my dog?
Hookworms suck blood and therefore cause internal blood loss. They are a serious threat to dogs, especially young puppies that may not survive the blood loss without transfusions. In older animals the blood loss may be more chronic, and the pet may have diarrhea and show weight loss and may seem lethargic.

How do I prevent my dog from getting hookworms?
Similar to steps for prevention of other intestinal parasites, it is essential to keep your dog’s surroundings clean and prevent the dog from being in contaminated areas. Puppies should be treated for hookworms at 2, 4, 6, and 8 weeks of age, followed by administration of a monthly preventive treatment. Fecal examinations should be conducted 2 to 4 times during the first year of life and 1 to 2 times per year in adults. Nursing mothers should be treated along with their puppies.

Can humans be harmed by hookworms?
Some hookworms of dogs can infect humans by penetrating the skin. This is most likely to occur when walking barefoot on the beach or other areas where pets deposit feces. Infection usually results in an itching sensation at the point where the larvae enter the skin and visible tracks on the skin. The condition is easily treated but can cause mild to extreme discomfort in the affected person. One species of hookworm that infects dogs is known to develop in the human intestine, too, where it may cause disease.

Giardia in Dogs
Giardia is a single-celled parasite that lives in your dog’s intestine. It infects older dogs but more frequently infects puppies. Dogs become infected when they swallow Giardia that may be present in water or other substances that have been soiled with feces.

How will Giardia affect my dog?
Many dogs infected with Giardia do not get any disease. Giardiasis, the disease caused by Giardia infection, usually results in diarrhea. Some animals with giardiasis may also throw up. Having giardiasis a long time can
cause weight loss; generally poor condition; and even death, when the disease is serious.

**How do I prevent my dog from getting Giardia?**
The best way to prevent Giardia infection is to make sure that your dog has safe, clean drinking water. It is important not to allow dogs to drink water from areas where other animals have left their feces. To prevent spreading Giardia (and other parasites), pick up the feces left by your dog immediately and place it in the trash. Be sure to avoid contact with the feces by using gloves, a bag over your hand, or a scooping device. Also be sure to thoroughly wash your hands after picking up feces, even if wearing gloves.

**Can humans be harmed by Giardia?**
*Giardia* is a common cause of diarrhea in people, and there is a chance that *Giardia* from dogs could infect people and cause disease. Infection of people with *Giardia* from dogs is rare. It is likely that most people become infected with *Giardia* passed by other people rather than *Giardia* from pets.

**Coccidia in Dogs**
Coccidia are tiny single-celled parasites that live in the wall of your dog’s intestine. They are found more often in puppies, but they can also infect older dogs. Dogs become infected by swallowing soil that contains coccidia or other substances in the environment that may contain dog feces such as grass or stagnant water from ponds or puddles.

**How will coccidia affect my dog?**
Coccidiosis, the disease caused by coccidia, may not cause any signs in dogs but is usually more serious in puppies. The most common sign of coccidiosis is diarrhea. More severe infections can cause bloody diarrhea. Severe infections, especially in puppies, can kill them due to dehydration and malnutrition as a result of prolonged diarrhea.

**How do I prevent my dog from getting coccidia?**
Coccidial infections can be prevented by removing your dog’s feces regularly from your yard or other areas where the dog goes to the bathroom. Because coccidia are found most often in puppies, it is important to have puppies examined for the parasite as soon as possible and to recheck them several times during their puppy check-ups.