



Intestinal Worms in Dogs and Cats

There are four groups of worms that are of main concern in dogs and cats - Roundworm, Tapeworm, Hookworm and Whipworm. All can cause significant weight loss, poor coat condition and diarrhoea, and some are infectious to people.

When should I worm my dog or cat?

Worm your puppy or kitten every two weeks from birth until three months (12 weeks) of age with a suitable puppy/kitten wormer based on their weight. Between three and six months of age, young dogs and cats should be wormed once a month.

Worming of adult cats and dogs depends on the product used, but should be done regularly for the rest of your pets life. There are worm tablets which last 3 months, and spot-on products which give one month of coverage. Some are combined with flea- and heartworm prevention as well.

Are intestinal worms infectious to humans?

Two of the dog intestinal worms are a potential source of infection for humans:

Roundworm is a common intestinal worm of the puppy but rarer in the adult dog. It is transmitted directly from the bitch to pups via the placenta and later via the milk and is the reason we worm pups so early in life. It has a complicated life cycle and part of it is spent moving through the host's body.

Children are more susceptible than adult humans to infection with roundworm eggs and can have complications with the larval stages. Blindness and skin irritations are the most common problems. Puppies with heavy infections of roundworm tend to do poorly and usually look pot-bellied. A severe infection can block the intestinal tract. Pups should be wormed for their own health as well as to prevent the spread to humans.

Tapeworm infection in humans from dogs (and cats) can come from two types of worms: the Hydatid tapeworm and the Common tapeworm.

The Hydatid tapeworm is a major health risk to humans. In Australia there is only a version that affects dogs. In the dog it is a tiny tapeworm that does little to harm the host, but in the human it causes a massive cyst, usually in the liver but can be the brain, which can leak and cause nasty immune reactions. It requires surgical removal. The dog develops hydatid tapeworm after eating sheep carcasses or offal contaminated with the larval stage of this worm. The adult worm lives in the dog's intestinal tract and it's eggs are shed in the dog's faeces. If a sheep eats the eggs the life-cycle is completed and the larvae stay dormant in the sheep's liver until a dog eat the sheep's liver. Humans are infected from the dog usually by patting an infected dog and then accidentally ingesting the eggs. Working sheep dogs are particularly at risk **in our direct area**.

High risk dogs should be wormed every 6 weeks with a tape-wormer and dogs should never be fed raw offal.

Another type of tapeworm, the Common tapeworm, is transmitted by fleas and therefore it is also important to use regular flea control products in both dogs and cats.

If you own dogs and cats, you should also regularly worm yourself and your children. Wormers for humans can be obtained from your local pharmacist or consult your family doctor.

Ringworm is not a worm!

Did you know ring worm is actually a fungus? Ringworm is common in young animals and is contagious to people.

There is no preventative treatment for ringworm and it is also not treated by giving an intestinal worm product. Therefore, if your pet has hair loss, please seek veterinary advice immediately as your pet may have ringworm.