



Clermont Animal Hospital Inc

## Adult Dog Parasites

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*Parasites are living beings such as worms or insects that live on or inside your pet. They usually feed upon your pet, which can cause them to be uncomfortable, malnourished or even to die.*

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### **Intestinal Parasites**

Intestinal parasites, such as whipworms, hookworms, tapeworms and giardia, are a very common problem in adult dogs. If your dog has exposure to other animals or is recently from an animal shelter, he or she is at a higher risk.

### **Symptoms**

Symptoms of intestinal parasites include vomiting and diarrhea, poor condition of fur, and in extreme cases, death. However, some dogs with parasites do not show these symptoms. Just because you do not see the worms does not mean that they are not there. It is important to realize these worms live in the intestines, so you will NOT see them in the stool of your dog unless they are dead or dying.

### **Diagnosis—Fecal Analysis**

We recommend a routine fecal examination for all new dogs, and then examinations twice a year (preferably spring and fall) thereafter. For adult dogs, we use a sophisticated test involving a series of steps including centrifugation and flotation. This provides much more accurate results than the simple flotation technique that most vets use. Please bring a small amount of stool with you when you bring your dog for vaccinations. If you have several dogs sharing the same yard, only one stool sample is needed. It is best if the sample is less than 24 hours old.

The fecal analysis shows if there are intestinal parasite eggs or single-cell parasites called giardia in your dog's stool. This is important to know because some parasites can infect humans when the eggs are being shed in the stool. It is also important to know that your dog can re-infect himself or infect other dogs when eggs are being passed. Eggs can survive in your yard for long periods (in some cases, up to 5 years) if stools are not properly disposed of. For this reason, it is important to pick up all stools promptly and properly dispose of them if your dog has parasite eggs in the stool.

Also, please note that just because your dog's fecal analysis was negative (no worm eggs) at a previous visit, it does not mean that these parasites are not present. Due to their complex life cycle, worms may be present without shedding eggs. For new dogs, it is important to have at least three negative stool samples before we can assure you that your dog is free of all parasites. Twice a year stool tests will help make sure your dog remains parasite free.

### **Can intestinal parasites affect my family?**

It is important for you to know if your dog is currently shedding eggs in his or her stool so you can protect your family. Humans, particularly children, can be infected with certain worms by ingesting the egg or larva (baby worm). This is only a concern if there are eggs in your dog's stool. Prompt removal of all stool and proper hygiene can easily prevent any chance of infection.

If your dog is actively shedding parasite eggs, it is very important to be as clean as possible in dealing with your dog. **It is also very important to pick up ALL stools to prevent accidental infection of a family member or re-infection of your dog.** If the stool is left in the yard, eggs can survive in for more than a year and can contaminate soil even after the stool has degraded.

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## **Tapeworms**

While most intestinal parasites have a direct life cycle (meaning they pass directly from dog to dog), tapeworms do not. The tapeworm requires an intermediate host—an animal other than a dog—to complete its life cycle.

**Two types of tapeworms are seen in cats.** The first type is spread by the flea. A dog ingests a flea carrying the tapeworm while grooming or biting at fleas, and the tapeworm then infects the dog. This type of tapeworm must be treated by treating both the worm itself AND the fleas. Otherwise, the fleas will continue to re-infect the dog with tapeworms.

The second type of tapeworms seen in dogs uses rabbits and/or rodents as the intermediate host. If the dog kills and eats an animal carrying these tapeworms, he or she can become infected. This type of tapeworm is much less common in dogs, but dogs that hunt regularly may suffer tapeworm infections.

**Diagnosis:** Because tapeworms use an intermediate host and are not passed through the stool from dog to dog, the eggs do not always show up on fecal exam. Most of the time a tapeworm infection is diagnosed when an owner sees the worm segments (which look like a rice grain or a cucumber seed) near the anus or on the stool of the dog.

**Treatment:** Tapeworms require special medication for treatment. Routine wormers for other types of worms have no effect on the tapeworm. Once tapeworms are diagnosed the veterinarian will prescribe medication specifically for tapeworms. Remember that if a flea problem exists, it is also VERY important to treat the fleas at the same time to prevent re-infection.