

Deworming Your Pets

Pets are curious animals and they encounter much of the world with their noses and mouths. This, unfortunately, means that they are susceptible to intestinal worms.

Deworming your cat or dog is an essential part of their preventative health care regime, but is often forgotten.

How Do Dogs and Cats Pick Up Worms?

Worms or internal parasites can be picked up:

- By licking the ground or drinking contaminated water.
- By ingesting infected fleas which can transmit tapeworms.
- Through the placenta, before birth, from the mother to the puppies.
- Through the milk of the mother to the unweaned kittens and puppies.
- From scavenging or hunting.
- From eating raw offal, which could be infected with tapeworm cysts.



Worms can be transmitted to humans by their pets and, in some cases, can cause serious health problems for both pets and humans. Deworming regularly is therefore as important as annual vaccinations and good nutrition.

Deworming of Pets



Common Types of Worms

Puppies and kittens are generally infected with these parasites from birth. Pets rarely pass worms, and even if they do, you will rarely see them. Most worms are identified by the presence of their eggs in a pet's faeces. These eggs are very small and are difficult to identify with the naked eye.

Tapeworms and roundworms are two of the few that can be seen by eye. Tapeworms are flat worms that look like small pieces of rice and can be found in the faeces or around the tail and rear area. You might see your dog scoot his rear across the ground as the worms can be irritating. Roundworms are long, white worms that look like noodles or spaghetti and live in the digestive tract where they lay eggs that are rejected in stool. These eggs can survive 2 years outdoors before being accidentally ingested by a dog or a cat. Puppies may occasionally vomit these up or they can also be seen in faeces.

Danger of Worms

A worm infestation can cause enteritis which can result in diarrhoea (sometimes with blood and mucous). Some worms suck blood, which causes blood loss in the animal, leading to weakness and even death. Heavy worm burdens can block the intestines and cause the death of the animal. Another danger of worms lies in the transmission from dogs or cats to humans.

Symptoms of Worm Infestation

Pets may exhibit the following symptoms of worm infestation:

- Bloody stools.
- Loss of appetite.

- Anaemia (pale gums and eye membranes).
- Diarrhoea.
- Weight loss.
- Poor growth.
- Pot-bellied appearance.
- Coughing.
- Loss of vision in one or both eyes.
- Neurological signs: ataxia, tremors and head shakes.

Treatment of Worms

An adult pet should be given a dewormer every 3–4 months and puppies and kittens should be dewormed at each vaccination (6, 8, 12 and 16 weeks). Discuss the most appropriate deworming treatment with your veterinarian.

As puppies and kittens grow, they develop resistance to worms and you can then bring the treatment down to every three months. Some flea control products contain a mild dewormer and, if using these products monthly, deworming can be stretched to every six months.

Kittens and puppies can be infected with roundworms from a very young age, making it important to start deworming early and repeat it regularly. Tapeworms are more likely to be a problem in adult cats and at this age less frequent, but still regular, deworming is required.

Deworming treatments do not prevent worms, they only kill worms, so it's important to deworm regularly. There are many options available to help you treat worms, with the most common being tablets and spot-on treatments.



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Tips to Keep your Family Safe from Worms

- Always wash your hands after working or playing with your pets.
- Never allow dogs or cats to lick your face.
- Fence off vegetable gardens to prevent dogs or cats from defecating in these areas.
- Wash all vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Never share cooking utensils with pets.
- Never feed raw offal to your pets – make sure it is well cooked.

After a Deworming Treatment

Many deworming treatments begin to work instantly. If you use a tablet or chewable worming treatment you have to make sure your dog swallows it completely.

Some dogs may try to spit it out immediately or even several minutes after you have administered it. Some dogs can occasionally vomit shortly after taking the medication.

Ask your veterinarian for advice if this happens. As long as the dewormer was in the dog for about 20 minutes, it should be effective.

Different deworming products act in different ways. You may see worms in your dog's droppings after deworming them. Some dewormers paralyse and kill the worms, which may be visible in your dog's faeces after the treatment has started to work. Other dewormers kill and break up the worms so you are less likely to see whole worms in the faeces.

Deworming your pet once may not be enough to fully protect them from worms. Regular treatment is the best defence against worms and other parasites.

The Worm Cycle

