

REDUCE PARASITE RISKS TO YOUR PET AND TO YOUR FAMILY

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What is a fecal and why is it so important?

Why does your vet ask you to bring in a fecal specimen (poo) when your dog or cat goes for its annual checkup? We ask for this so we can check your pet for intestinal parasites, including some that can be a threat to human health.

Most of these worms cannot be detected with the naked eye. In other words, you will not be able to see evidence that your pet has worms just by looking at the feces. Worms such as roundworms and hookworms do not want to exit the pet's body; they will die if they do so. We only see worms in the animal's poo when the worms have been crowded out, in a heavily infected pet. With average worm burdens, the worms stay in the intestine of the host for their entire life-span. The only way to detect these worms is by testing the pet's stools.

We look for worm eggs. If we see worm eggs, we know the pet has worms in its intestine.

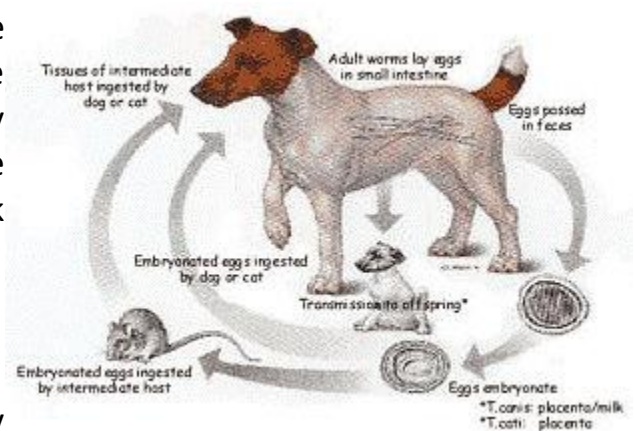
Your veterinarian does a test called a "fecal" to check for worm eggs in your pet's poo. We mix a small portion of the feces with a special flotation solution, pass it through a strainer to catch the larger pieces of material that may obscure the eggs, then pour the strained solution into a small vial. We place a cover slip at the top of the vial. The worm eggs float to the top of the vial after 10 minutes and stick to the cover slip. We then examine the cover slip under the microscope for the distinctive eggs of various types of intestinal parasites.

We are specifically looking for eggs of roundworms, hookworms and whipworms, and for one-celled protozoan parasites such as Coccidia or Giardia in the fecal test.

We also look for eggs of the tapeworm, one intestinal parasite that can be detected in the animal's feces by the pet owner. It reproduces by shedding segments of its body, which can be visible as rice-like objects on top of the pet's feces or stuck to the fur around its anal area.

What's the risk from intestinal parasites?

Intestinal parasites can make your pet sick and they are also a human health hazard. Untreated worms lay eggs that are shed into your pet's stools and into its environment. People, especially children or immuno-suppressed adults, can be infected by animal parasites when they work or play in areas contaminated with parasite eggs –for example, soil in the yard, garden or



sandbox. Children are often less careful about washing their hand and more likely to put their hands in their mouth after playing in the dirt.

An estimated 10,000 children per year in the United States are infected with roundworms, and approximately 750 will suffer permanent visual impairment or blindness when migrating larvae lodge in their eyes. Although the statistics we have are from the U.S., we know the risk for similar infections exists in Canada.

How can I reduce the risk for my family?

Vets and medical doctors are certainly not recommending you get rid of your family pet. Good hygiene and common sense is all that are needed. Here is a list of ways you can reduce the risk:

- bring a fecal specimen from each cat and dog to your veterinarian at least once a year, to have it tested for worm eggs
- if you cannot get a poop sample from your outdoor cat, deworm it 2-4 times a year for roundworms and tapeworms, to be on the safe side
- practice good hygiene by washing hands regularly
- remove pet stools from your yard 2-3 times weekly (worm eggs are not infective when fresh, only after they have embryonated for a week or so in the pet's feces) and wash your hands immediately afterwards
- clean cat litter boxes daily and wash your hands immediately afterwards
- wear gloves when gardening
- do not drink water from streams or other sources that may be contaminated with animal feces
- wash all fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating
- do not allow children to go barefoot outdoors in areas where animals may have defecated in the past (worm eggs can survive months or years in infected soil)
- keep children away from areas with pet stools
- keep sandboxes covered when not in use
- deworm your pet at regular intervals (see information below)
- get deworming medication from a veterinarian; over-the-counter medications have low efficacy
- keep your pets flea free (fleas are the intermediate host for tapeworms), using flea preventatives available from your veterinarian

Why routine deworming?

Routine deworming involves treating cats and dogs for worms at regular intervals. This will prevent infection with intestinal parasites and the shedding of worm eggs into your yard or home. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists (AAVP) recommend puppies and kittens be dewormed once every 2

weeks until they are 3 months of age, then once monthly until they are 6 months old, and that adult dogs and cats be dewormed at least 4 times per year. Speak to your veterinarian about his or her recommendations for your family pets.

