

Pet Worms & Human Health

Worming your pets is not only important for your pet's health but also essential for the health of young children in contact with your pets and their environment. This also includes the youngest children of all, the ones still in the womb. Intestinal worms are capable of causing diseases, in particular, visceral, cutaneous and ocular larval migrans. These Latin gibberish words simply refer to the larva (babies) of the intestinal worms invading the guts, skin and eyes of young children. The issues associated with this can be anything from severe rash to organ malfunction and blindness, terrible consequences by any account. Cats, and kittens in particular, also carry toxoplasma. This can cause muscle, brain and eye infections in infants and cause abortion in pregnant women.

The best way of avoiding these problems is to regularly worm your pets. Generally we recommend worming your puppy or kitten every 2 weeks until 3 months of age and then monthly until 6 months, and thereafter three monthly. Children and pregnant women in particular should avoid contact with pet's faeces, children's sand pits should be covered! Unfortunately toxoplasma is not killed by worming and cannot be easily controlled meaning avoiding faecal contact is all that more important, especially with kittens. Toxoplasma can also be caught from undercooked or uncooked sheep meat as well so pregnant women and infants should avoid contact with it. Thankfully in healthy, non-pregnant adults toxoplasma has no harmful effects.

WORM TYPES (Courtesy of Bayer NZ)

Roundworms

Roundworms are zoonotic parasites, which means they can be passed from animals to humans - especially children. They can also be exceptionally good survivors, with viable eggs able to live outside the animal for several years. Roundworm symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, pot-belly and colic. Puppies can develop roundworm at the foetal stage, prior to being born.



Hookworms

The most dangerous of all intestinal worms, hookworms survive by burrowing into a pet's intestinal wall and sucking blood. Female hookworms can lay up to 30,000 eggs daily. These hatch in the faeces. Infection is caused by swallowing or skin penetration. Your cat or dog could experience enteritis, diarrhoea, dehydration and ultimately death from anaemia. Like roundworms, they are zoonotic parasites and can affect humans



Tapeworms

Common flea tapeworm larvae develop in fleas, and when a pet eats an infected flea while grooming itself, the tapeworm develops in the animal's gut. Other tapeworm larvae develop in rodents that can be eaten by pets, especially cats. While not a major health risk, tapeworms cause itching and can be responsible for dogs rubbing their backsides on the ground, and irritation displayed by cats.



Whipworms

Whipworms live in the lower bowel of dogs and can survive for up to a year, laying more than 2000 eggs each day. These eggs are passed in the droppings and can survive in soil and pet surroundings for years. Symptoms include pain, diarrhoea and weight loss.



A regular worming programme is essential

While worming is effective in killing worms that are present in the intestine at the time of treatment, worming is not a vaccine against future attacks. This is why regular treatment, especially in your pet's early months, is essential to the pet's health. Dogs and cats can be re-infected from other pets and from the environment.

BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS OF OLDER PETS

It is not unusual for behavioural problems to develop in older pets. Changes in the household, environment and new stresses can lead to problems regardless of age. Older pets can also develop medical and degenerative problems as they age. Any of the organ systems can be affected and play a role in the development of a wide variety of behaviour problems. A decline in senses (hearing and sight), painful conditions, and those that affect mobility may cause the pet to be more irritable or more fearful of approach and handling.



Regardless of age, every behaviour case must begin with a complete veterinary physical examination and a clinical and behavioural history. In addition, blood tests and a urinalysis may be needed to rule out organ disease and endocrine imbalances. Sometimes a more in depth examination of a particular organ system may be indicated.

Many problems have an underlying medical cause that can be treated or controlled with drugs, diets or perhaps surgery. Changes in behaviour, an increase or decrease in appetite or drinking, an increased frequency or amount of urination, loss of urine control, changes in stool consistency or frequency, skin and hair coat changes, lumps and bumps, mouth odour or bleeding gums, stiffness or soreness, excessive panting, coughing, changes in weight, and tremors or shaking are some of the more common signs that should be reported if they develop.

Hormonal changes can lead to dramatic changes in the pet's behaviour and many of these problems can be treated or controlled. Degenerative organ systems can often be aided with nutritional supplementation or dietary changes. High blood pressure, cardiac disease and respiratory diseases may be treatable with medication, which may dramatically improve the quality and even length of the pet's life.

It is generally believed that a dog's ability tends to decrease with age – it is called cognitive dysfunction. This may also be true for cats. If your dog has one or more of the following behavioural signs and all potential medical and physical causes have been ruled out, it may be due to cognitive dysfunction:

- ◆ Decreased reaction to stimuli
- ◆ Confusion, disorientation, weakness
- ◆ Decreased interaction with the owners
- ◆ Increased irritability
- ◆ Irregular sleep cycles
- ◆ Increased vocalisation
- ◆ House-soiling or loss of previously learned behavior's
- ◆ Decreased ability to recognise commands, people, places, or other animals
- ◆ Decreased interest in food
- ◆ Circling, repetitive and compulsive disorders
- ◆ Decreased tolerance to being left alone

In one study 62% of dogs between 11-16 years of age exhibited at least one of the signs above. In cognitive dysfunction, depletion of brain dopamine levels may be responsible for many of the behaviour changes. There are some new drugs to help try and normalise these levels. However once new habits are learned, retraining and changes to the environment may also be needed to resolve the problem.

Dogs that develop behaviour problems due to underlying medical conditions may need alterations in their schedule or environment in order to deal with these problems. If the condition is treatable and can be controlled or resolved then you must be prepared to retrain the dog since the new habit may persist.

Animal Humour

There were two cows in a field. The first cow said "moo" and the second cow said "baaaa." The first cow asked the second cow, "why did you say baaaa?" The second cow said, "I'm learning a foreign language."



A duck, a skunk and a deer went out for dinner at a restaurant one night. When it came time to pay, the skunk didn't have a scent, the deer didn't have a buck so they put the meal on the duck's bill.



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