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WHIPWORMS

What are whipworms?

Whipworms, *Trichuris vulpis* are intestinal parasites which are about 7 cm (3 inches) long. They live in the large intestine (caecum and colon) of dogs where they cause severe irritation to the lining of these organs. This results in watery, bloody diarrhoea, weight loss, and general debilitation. They are one of the most pathogenic (harmful) worms found in dogs.

How did my dog get whipworms?

Whipworms pass microscopic eggs in the faeces. The eggs are very resistant to drying and heat, so they can remain viable in the dog's environment for years. They mature and are able to reinfect the dog in 10-60 days. The eggs are swallowed and return to the lower intestinal tract to complete the life cycle.

How is whipworm infection diagnosed?

Whipworms are diagnosed by finding eggs with a microscopic examination of the faeces. However, multiple samples are often required because these parasites pass small numbers of eggs on an irregular basis. Any dog with chronic diarrhoea can be suspected of having whipworms, regardless of several negative faeces examinations. It is an accepted practice to treat for whipworms based on assumption of infection. Response to treatment is an indication that whipworms were present but could not be detected on faecal examination. They are more common in kennels in the UK, particularly those with grass runs.

How are whipworms treated?

There are several drugs that are effective against whipworms. Two treatments are needed at a 3-4 week interval, but because reinfection is such a problem, it is advisable to treat again every 3-4 months. Whipworms are not very common now because of widespread use of the broad spectrum deworming preparations.

Can I get whipworms from my dog?

Whipworms are not infectious to people; they are only parasites of the dog.