

STRATEGIES FOR PARASITE CONTROL

Part of the mission of veterinarians worldwide has always been the protection of human health. For example, rabies control efforts and routine rabies vaccination of pets has greatly reduced the number of human rabies fatalities in the U.S. In the 1940's over 5000 dogs died every year of this disease, and hundreds of people died too.

Fun/disgusting facts about parasites!!

Ascarids (roundworms) can shed 200,000 eggs a day and each egg is able to remain infective in the soil for years.

Strategic deworming (deworming at intervals all year round) can prevent heavy worm infestations in pets with high exposure to parasites. This is especially important for outdoor cats.

95% of puppies and kittens are born with intestinal parasites already present in their body.

Between 1980 and 1996 only 32 people died of rabies in the U.S. and 12 of those contracted the disease in foreign countries. Although we don't like to think of our pets as being harmful to our health, disease *can* be spread from our companion and farm animals to us and vice versa. Tuberculosis, *E. coli*, *Cryptosporidium*, cat scratch fever, pink eye, toxoplasmosis and ringworm are other examples.

Keeping your pet safe and healthy protects your human family from disease. The most common problems spread from pets to people nowadays are intestinal parasites. **Over 10,000 people, most of them children, are infected with dog or cat roundworms every year in the U.S.** In the wrong host the larvae of these worms get confused. Instead of ending up in the intestinal tract, some of them will migrate to the brain, eyes, liver and other organs. Over 700 people suffer blindness or permanent visual impairment each year from these migrating larvae. Thousands of others develop brain, liver, skin or gastrointestinal signs from roundworm, hookworm

and *Giardia* infections.

Because of the human health hazards of these intestinal parasites the human Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta (CDC) has issued deworming guidelines for pets. The American Heartworm Society has made changes in their recommendations as well, because most heartworm preventatives help prevent

One of the parasites that heartworm pills don't affect is the water-borne protozoal parasite *Giardia*. A vaccine is now available to protect dogs from this disease, and a cat vaccine is under development. Puppies living in kennels and dogs who swim in lakes, ponds or streams are at highest risk. Consider providing this vaccine to your dog if you plan on breeding her or if he or she goes swimming.

Hookworm larvae get into a new host by burrowing into the skin. In people they can cause an unsightly rash on the face, feet or wherever they have entered the body. Do your children go outside in bare feet?

intestinal parasites in addition to heartworms. Because of these recommendations, many veterinary clinics are adjusting their protocols. Some will offer you choices for heartworm testing and medication protocols.

Unlike heartworms, intestinal parasites are not spread by mosquitoes. They can be acquired by pets all year 'round, even in parts of the country that have cold winters. Therefore, since Heartgard, Interceptor and Sentinel protect against intestinal parasites as

well as heartworms, it may make sense to give these pills every month all year long, not just during mosquito season.

If your indoor cat is on heartworm preventative, giving the heartworm pills seasonally in mosquito season is probably fine. For cats that go outdoors and are more likely to pick up intestinal parasites, year round may be best.

Female kittens and puppies are born with roundworm larvae already encysted in the uterus, waiting to migrate into future offspring. Encysted larvae are one way even indoor cats can become positive for intestinal parasites. These dormant larvae can awake and reinfect a pet years later. Encysted larvae are resistant to the dewormers currently available.

It is important to remember that **it is still essential to check stool samples on your pets, even if they are on year 'round preventatives!** Heartworms prevent some intestinal parasites but by no means all of them. Even indoor cats get intestinal parasites! Protect your pets and yourself by having stool samples checked at least once a year. Whatever else you do please always remember to wash your hands after cleaning the litter box, picking up stool from the yard, doing gardening or yard work or roughhousing with a pet. Wash your children's hands too!

When it comes to health care, prevention is the name of the game. Human diseases that are no longer considered a threat in the United States, such as Polio and whooping cough, are still common in 3rd world countries where vaccination is not a standard of care. With air travel what it is today, without vaccinations these diseases would quickly recur.

In pets, it is wild, feral or poorly cared for dogs and cats who serve as the reservoir for contagious diseases. When prevention measures stop these diseases quickly reappear in our pets. Despite rabies prevention efforts, 6500 cases of rabies are reported in wildlife each year in the U.S. and 22,000 people require rabies injections for exposure to the virus annually.

For combination control of multiple parasites, consider Sentinal or the new Revolution, which makes it easier to remember flea control as well as heartworm prevention. Cats that live indoors are at low risk for fleas. Those that go outdoors, even on a leash or limited to a deck or porch, or who live in households with dogs, also may need flea protection. Fleas bite people as well as pets and there are few things more miserable than living in a house infested with them!

In a recent nationwide study of 6,458 dogs, 15% were found to have roundworms, 19% had hookworms, 14% suffered from whipworms. In the Midwest, 39.2% of the dogs had at least one of these types of parasite.

