

Hookworms

Hookworms are among the most common intestinal parasites found in dogs and cats. Adult worms are microscopic in size and live in the pet's small intestine. The female worm deposits her eggs there, which are then passed in the pet's feces (stool).

The main signs of hookworm parasitism are anemia and diarrhea. The hookworm attaches itself to the inner lining of the intestine, where it causes inflammation and sucks blood from the pet. Young animals with a large number of worms can literally be bled to death. As few as 50 hookworms can cause a daily blood loss of well over 1 oz. Young, weak or malnourished pets may collapse and die suddenly. In adult animals, hookworms usually cause a slow, progressive wasting disease. Weight loss, diarrhea, and tarry or bloody stools should alert you to the possibility of hookworm disease. Since the worms are microscopic, examination of your pet's feces for hookworm eggs is the only reliable means of diagnosis.

There are four ways that hookworms are transmitted:

- 1) The eggs passed in an animal's feces hatch into larvae. These larvae can penetrate directly through the skin and then migrate to the intestines and become adults.
- 2) The larvae can also migrate to a female dog's mammary glands, where they are shed in the milk, infecting her puppies as early as their first meal.
- 3) The larvae can be ingested by the pet when it licks its feet or other area contaminated from contact with an infected stool.
- 4) Larvae can also be obtained by eating an intermediate host animal, such as an insect or rodent, which has eaten or otherwise come into contact with infected stools.

Hookworms can neither grow to maturity nor cause intestinal problems in people. They can, however, penetrate human skin, where they become lost and die, producing a small, itchy, reddened area. If your pet has hookworms, proper clean up and disposal of pet wastes will help eliminate any chance of exposure to people or other pets in the household.

Treatment of hookworms usually consists of a liquid or tablet medication given twice, two weeks apart. A stool sample is then checked 4 weeks after the second de-worming, to make sure the worms have been eliminated. Medication will also be given as necessary to treat any related problems such as diarrhea. Most heartworm preventatives also prevent hookworm infestation.

Caring People Helping Pets

2082 Cheyenne Court, Grafton, WI 53024 • phone: 262-375-0130 • fax: 262-375-4196 • www.bestfriendsvet.com

