

Worming my pet – how important is it?

If you own a dog or cat, no doubt you are aware of the advice to regularly worm them. Many people check their dog's or cat's faeces, and never see any worms passed, and while the pet looks fit and healthy with a shiny coat, is there really any need to worm them?

Let's have a look at some of the evidence.

Where would my pet pick up worms?

- Roundworm larvae can be found on grass or vegetation in any area where another dog or cat has defaecated in the previous year. Pets that sniff the ground, chew or eat grass, play with balls or other toys outside, or sniff or lick other animals (especially around the anus) will be regularly coming into contact with roundworm larvae such as *Toxocara*.
- Tapeworm cysts are present in the muscles and tissues of wildlife, such as rats, mice and birds, and livestock such as sheep. Cats which hunt, or dogs which are let off the lead in fields, farmland or moorland may contract tapeworm by nosing around or eating fragments of dead animals.
- Lungworm larvae are found in many species of small slug and snail. Dogs may accidentally eat an infected slug through drinking from water outside, chewing toys or sticks found in the grass, by eating grass or sniffing at or eating faeces from any animal.

As you can see, almost any pet that leads a normal life is coming into contact with these parasites regularly! But why are they a problem?

- *Toxocara*, the roundworm of dogs, and *Toxascaris*, the roundworm of cats, may cause intestinal upsets if present in the gut in large numbers. With good nutrition and effective wormers these days it is rare to see adult animals heavily infested.

However, these parasites also hibernate within infected dog's tissues, and pass to puppies and kittens in large

numbers through the placenta of pregnant bitches and queens. Because of this, all puppies and kittens are born already with a worm burden, which can cause serious disease. Newborn animals lack a strong immune system to defeat the worms and can quickly become overwhelmed, sicken and die.

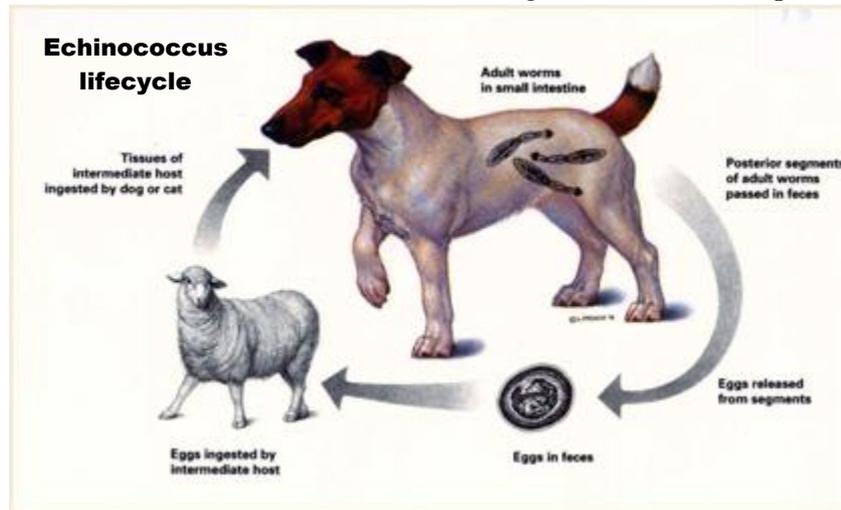
Toxocara larvae may also cause a rare disease in children called Visceral Larval Migrants, with occasional cases of blindness or brain damage.

Toxocara canis larvae viewed under a microscope



- Echinococcus, a very tiny tapeworm of dogs, causes little health problems in dogs, but the eggs are passed in infected dog's faeces and are contagious to people. This worm is responsible for the very serious Hydatid Disease – fluid filled cysts that grow within the liver or lungs of humans, and need to be removed surgically.

The sheep farming areas of Powys and Gwent have the highest incidence of Hydatid disease in the UK, because of the high numbers of sheep and dogs.



- Lungworm in dogs is increasing in frequency in the South Wales area. It can cause lung damage and breathing problems, or cause abnormal bleeding. Severe cases may die or need a blood transfusion. This worm is not killed with conventional worming tablets, but veterinary treatments are available.

Lungworm can be carried by slugs and snails



As you can see, even a pet that looks fit and healthy can be carrying parasites that may be harmful to you or your children. In most cases, worm eggs or larvae are so tiny that you need a microscope to see them. Just because you cannot see them in the faeces does not mean they are not there!

Fortunately, they can be easily controlled using a good quality veterinary wormer. Speak to your vet about your pet's risk level – they will recommend how often to treat your pet and which products to use to gain peace of mind.