

DOG WORMS

Why should I worry about 'worms'?

There are several different species of intestinal worms that can infect cats and dogs in the UK. Some are only a few millimetres long, others can grow to an amazing 5 metres in length (and if that makes you squirm, imagine how your dog must feel!)

Some live off the contents of the gut, in effect, scavenging the animal's food, while others attach themselves to the gut wall and live off your dog's blood.

Worms stop dogs absorbing all the nutrients in their food and can actually damage the internal lining of the gut. They can cause diarrhoea, bleeding into the gut, weight loss, vomiting and general ill-health. Worst of all, some can infect people as well as dogs – which is one of the best reasons to keep your dog worm-free.

How would my dog get worms anyway?

Roundworms, tapeworms and, less commonly, whipworms, hookworms and heartworm make up the spectrum of internal parasites that are normally referred to as 'worms'. Nature has given them some weird and wonderful ways of surviving and multiplying, but however improbable these strategies may seem, they are highly successful.

Most types of roundworm and hookworm eggs and larvae can be ingested from soil that has been contaminated with faeces of an infected animal. Eggs can lay dormant in soil for up to a year. Be particularly aware if your dog enjoys snuffling round or rolling in anything smelly and disgusting!!

Dogs are natural scavengers and at least two types of tapeworm from grazing mammals can also infect dogs. Feeding raw meat could allow your dog to become infected. Fleas carry larvae of another common tapeworm. When your dog is bitten by an infected flea, he reacts quite naturally, by scratching, licking and biting – and as a result, often swallows the flea. The larvae inside the flea then matures in the dog's gut after being ingested.

The fox creates another problem. The majority of foxes, both urban and rural carry hookworms whose larvae may be eaten by your dog from contaminated ground.

What about puppies?

The main risk to puppies comes from roundworms and, as they get older, the tapeworm. Roundworms can be transmitted to puppies via the placenta or through their mother's milk. Tapeworms mature in your puppies gut if a flea is ingested.

So what are the signs of worm infection?

One obvious sign is "scooting" – that is, dragging the bottom along the ground. This may indicate tapeworm infection. The dog does it because the egg filled segments shed by the mature tapeworms are expelled via the anus and cause irritation.

Heavy roundworm infections may cause a distended stomach and almost any type of intestinal worm can cause vomiting or diarrhoea where physical evidence of worms may

be seen. However, roundworm eggs in faeces are not visible to the naked eye, so your dog may also have an infection without any visible signs.

In general, if your dog is showing signs of worms, they will have already reached maturity. It's far better to de-worm your dog regularly before the symptoms become obvious.

How do I treat my dog for worms?

There is no tablet or injection you can give a dog which will prevent worm infection. The best you can do is to kill any worms which may be present on a regular basis.

Treating for worms every three months is a good rule of thumb, but if your dog is prone to rolling in unmentionables, snuffling in the undergrowth or eating the faeces of grazing animals or foxes, he is at higher risk and should be treated every month.

Puppies should be treated for worms every fortnight until they're 12 weeks old, monthly until six months of age, then onto an adult worming regime suitable for his lifestyle.

What product should I use to treat for worms?

Remember - not all wormers are effective against all worms (see table under). We recommend that you should worm your pet with Drontal or Milbemax regularly.

Money saving tip: If you choose 'Advocate' as your pet's flea treatment – this also kills roundworms, whipworms and hookworms so you only need worm your dog with 'Droncit'. This is the best value for money all-round parasite protection programme we recommend and for a limited time in 2010 we will be giving free Droncit with all sales of Advocate.

Examples of Dog Wormers (active ingredients appear in brackets)	Roundworms	Flea Taneworms	Tapeworm (Taenia)	Tapeworm (F. arnulosis)	Whipworms	Hookworms
Drontal Plus -tablets (febantel/praziquantel/pyrantel pamoate)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Milbemax -tablet (milbemycin/praziquantel)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓*
Droncit - tablets, injection (praziquantel)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Advocate –spot on (imidoclopramid/moxidectin)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Piperazine (in some pet shop /supermarket preparations)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Bob Martin All-in-One (nitroscanate)	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓

* Not Uncinaria stenocephala