

CAT WORMS

Should I worry about worms infecting my cat?

There are several different species of intestinal worms that can infect cats 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 cat must feel!)

Cats can become infected with up to 8 different intestinal parasites, generally known as worms. Roundworm and tapeworm infections are most common in UK cats, They spend their adult life inside the intestines of your cat, some feeding off their blood and some from the food the cat eats.

Worms stop cats from absorbing all the nutrients in their food and can even damage the internal lining of the gut. Infections can cause diarrhoea, bleeding into the gut, weight loss, vomiting and general ill-health.

How would my cat get 'worms'?

Nature has given worms some weird and wonderful ways of surviving and multiplying, many of them almost unbelievable. But however improbable these strategies may seem, they are highly successful.

All of the small animals that are hunted by cats, e.g: mice, voles, shrews and rats can carry roundworm and tapeworm larvae which can infect your cat if ingested.

Most types of roundworm and hookworm can be acquired from soil contaminated by the faeces of an infected animal. Roundworm eggs, in particular, are great survivors, lying dormant in the soil for a year or more, until a cat picks them up on paws or muzzle, and swallows them while grooming.

Even house cats are at risk from worm infestations. Fleas can carry a type of tapeworm and if your cat accidentally consumes an infected flea while grooming, the immature tapeworm will enter the gut, where it will complete its life cycle.

What are the symptoms of worm infection?

It's not easy to determine whether a cat is infected with worms, particularly in the early stages. Your cat may suffer from vomiting or diarrhoea, and their coat may lose condition. Evidence of roundworms and tapeworms may be seen in stools and vomit, but this can be easily missed.

A cat with tapeworms may spend more time than usual cleaning its bottom, since the egg-filled worm segments can cause irritation. You may even find egg-filled segments in your cat's bedding - they are pale in colour, and about the size of a grain of rice.

A heavy roundworm infection may cause the cat's stomach to appear swollen and distended, but roundworm eggs passed in faeces are microscopic – so your cat could be infested with worms without any external signs.

Types of worms

Roundworm and tapeworm infections are most common in UK cats. Hookworms are a growing threat, largely because around 70% of our foxes (urban and rural) are now infected. Hookworms employ a slightly different soil-based strategy of infection and reproduction - eggs from a host's faeces hatch in the soil, and the larvae then burrow through the skin (usually on the feet) to get into a new host's bloodstream. Lungworm and toxoplasma infections are less frequent.

How do I treat my cat for worms?

Unfortunately, there is no tablet or injection you can give a cat 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 cat is an outdoorsy type or active hunter he is at higher risk of worm infection and should be dewormed every month.

What product should I use to treat for worms?

Remember - not all wormers are effective against all worms, especially off the shelf products from supermarkets or pet-shops. We recommend that you should worm your pet with Advocate, Droncit, Drontal or Profender.

My cat hates taking tablets!

Avoid the stress of giving tablets by choosing Profender– it kills all the worms you need to be concerned about and is easily applied by pipette to the skin on the back of the neck.

Money saving tip: If you choose 'Advocate' as your cat's flea treatment – this also kills roundworms and hookworms so you only need worm your cat with 'Droncit' or 'Profender' to tackle tapeworms. 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 Cat Wormers (active ingredients appear in brackets)	Roundworms	Flea Tapeworms	Tapeworm (Taenia)	Tapeworm (E.)	Hookworms
Drontal Cat -tablet (febantel/praziquantel/pyrantel)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Profender -spot on (praziquantel/emodepside)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Advocate –spot on (imidoclopramid/moxidectin)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Droncit -spot on, injection, tablet (praziquantel)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗