



Roundworms

Roundworms, also known as ascarids, are the most common intestinal parasite in dogs and cats. Puppies are born with them and some kittens have them. If you see long worms in your pet's stool, this is it.



Life Cycle

There are three different species of roundworms infesting dogs and cats. The dog roundworm is most common and this is the life cycle for it.

The adult roundworm lives in the small intestine and passes eggs in the stool. The eggs undergo a period of development in the environment. If your pet eats the eggs, your pet will have roundworms.

Rodents will also eat the eggs and then they serve as a transport host. This means the roundworms don't undergo any changes within the rodent but wait until your pet eats the rodent and then the roundworms infest your pet.

Once the eggs are in your pet's body, larvae develop. The larvae do not stay in the intestine, but migrate through the tissues of the body undergoing changes. Eventually they migrate to the lungs, where your pet coughs them up and swallows them. Once in the small intestines, the larvae develop into adults.

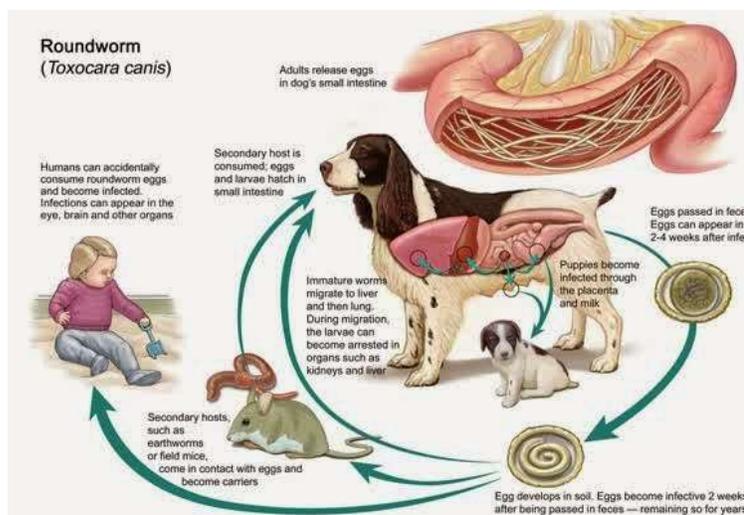
As they migrate through the body, some of the larvae stop and the body walls them off as cysts in the muscles and they stay there in a dormant state. These do not cause any problems.

Pregnancy in dogs, however, reactivates the dormant larvae. The larvae migrate through the mother dog's body and pass through the placenta infesting her unborn pups. Larvae also pass through the milk when puppies nurse. Because of this, puppies are born with roundworms.



The common cat roundworm does not go through the placenta but can go through the milk if the mother got roundworms while she was pregnant. Some kittens will then have roundworms.

The third roundworm can be in both dogs and cats but the larvae of that one do not migrate through tissues so they don't go through the placenta or the milk. Your pet gets that roundworm only by eating the eggs.



Signs

Signs of roundworm infestation include a rough hair coat, potbelly, diarrhea, vomiting, or a cough. Young puppies and kittens can experience an intestinal blockage from heavy infestations. Rarely, the condition can be fatal.



You may see worms in stool or vomitus. They are quite long and look like spaghetti (if you see a rice-like worm that is tapeworms).

We look for the eggs when we check a stool sample. Roundworms produce hundreds of eggs and are usually easy to find.

Treatment

Roundworms are relatively easy to treat, as there are several medications available. You must repeat the treatment in 2 weeks because the medicine only kills the adults and none of the migrating larvae. Have a stool sample examined several days after the last treatment.

Treat puppies and kittens at 2 weeks of age and then every 2 weeks until they are 8-10 weeks old. Some of the monthly heartworm medicines also control roundworms.

Risk to Humans

Roundworms are a threat to humans and can cause a disease called visceral larval migrans. The larvae migrate through the body, causing serious problems. If they go into the eye, they can cause blindness. Children are especially vulnerable. Fortunately, most human infections don't show any signs.

Environment

It is important to clean up well after pets that have the worms. The eggs are sticky which helps them to adhere to surfaces. A weak bleach solution (1:30 bleach to water) removes the stickiness and makes it easier to clean up surfaces in the house that are contaminated with feces.



Eggs survive for a long time in the soil and nothing kills them. The best you can do is to clean up stools as soon as possible. Don't allow children in areas used as a toilet by your dog, especially a puppy, and keep sandboxes covered so cats don't use them.

Have a stool sample checked at least once a year to look for parasite eggs. If your dog goes outside or to boarding kennels, have a check done every 6 months. The earlier you treat roundworms and other parasites, the better your pet will be.