



QA What you should know for the Health of your Pet and your Family

Answers to some commonly asked questions on pet health care.

Q: Is my dog really at risk for contracting heartworm disease?

A: Heartworm disease, which may cause death in dogs, has been diagnosed in all 50 of the United States. Whether your dog spends his days in the great outdoors or rarely ventures past the front step, he's still possibly at risk of exposure to heartworm disease.

Q: How do dogs get heartworm disease?

A: Heartworm disease is transmitted by the bite of an infective mosquito. Once heartworm larvae enter through the skin, they begin to grow in the dog's body. Eventually, the larvae migrate to the pulmonary arteries and the heart. After maturing, female heartworms can produce tiny larvae called microfilariae, which circulate in the dog's blood stream. When a previously non-infective mosquito bites an infected dog, it picks up microfilariae and the cycle starts all over again.

Q: How do I know for sure that my dog has heartworm disease?

A: Dogs infected with heartworms may not show any signs of illness at all, but with time, the dog may exhibit a cough, intolerance for exercise and, in severe cases, may die. A simple blood test is used to diagnose heartworm disease in dogs. The only way to know for sure is to call your veterinarian, and arrange for a heartworm test.

Q: What is the treatment for heartworm disease?

A: Even after a dog is diagnosed with heartworm disease, treatment can be difficult and expensive. Because of the risk, treatment for heartworm disease is conducted in the veterinary clinic; complete rest for four weeks or more may be required for a dog undergoing treatment. Dogs with severe heartworm infections are sometimes treated surgically.

Q: Are there other internal worms that I should be concerned about?

A: Heartworm disease isn't the only worm that can threaten your dog – you also need to be aware of the risks associated with intestinal worms, including roundworms and hookworms. As a dog owner, you may already be familiar with worms that often infect puppies and can also infect older dogs. The most common types of these worms are *roundworms* and *hookworms*. They are both *intestinal parasites*, which means that they live and grow inside the intestine of a host animal. Roundworms and hookworms develop from eggs into larvae and later mature into adult worms.

Q: Is my dog at risk of getting an intestinal parasite?

A: Dogs of any age can get roundworms and hookworms, but they are most vulnerable when they are very young. In fact, it is not unusual for puppies of only two or three weeks of age to harbor a significant number of worms. That's because these worms are almost always passed to puppies before birth. Puppies can also become infected with worms through their mothers' milk.

Q: How do I know if my dog has roundworms or hookworms?

A: Signs of infection may include: abdominal discomfort, vomiting, loss of appetite, severe weight loss, rapid blood loss or even sudden death. You should know, however, that dogs may be infected without appearing ill; most, in fact, show no signs at all. Again, visit your veterinarian and have them checked for these potentially zoonotic diseases.

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Q: I've heard of zoonosis before, but what is it?

A: Zoonosis (*zo-o-no-sis*) is the name used by healthcare providers, for any disease that can be passed from animals to people. You are probably aware of some of the better-known zoonoses (*zo-o-no-seez*) such as Lyme disease and rabies. Roundworm and hookworm infections are zoonotic (*zo-o-nah-tik*) as well. Some zoonoses are transmitted through direct contact with the body fluids of infected animals. *Rabies*, for instance, is carried in the saliva, and is typically spread through bites and scratches. Other zoonoses depend on an intermediate host, to carry disease-causing organisms from one host to another. *Lyme disease*, which is carried from wildlife to people and dogs by ticks, is one example of this type of zoonosis. Still other zoonoses are spread through exposure to infective organisms in a fecally contaminated area where they exist in large numbers. *Roundworm* and *hookworm infections* are zoonoses of this kind.

Q: How can people get roundworm and hookworm infections?

A: People may contract the larvae or eggs of these worms through direct contamination with infected feces or with contaminated soil, sand, plant life and other objects. Eggs or larvae of either type of worm may be eaten accidentally, but hookworm larvae usually enter the body by penetrating the skin. Researchers believe children are more vulnerable to infection than adults because children's play habits bring them into closer contact with contaminated objects and also because they are more likely to put contaminated objects into their mouths.

Q: How serious are these internal worm infections?

A: Roundworms enter the human body as eggs that soon hatch into larvae. These larvae may travel through the liver, lungs and other organs, causing tissue damage and sometimes affecting nerves or lodging in the eye. In some cases, they may cause permanent visual or neurological damage. Hookworm larvae migrate inside the body, just as roundworm larvae do. They typically move about within the skin, causing inflammation in the affected areas. One species of hookworm has been known to penetrate into deeper tissues and cause more serious damage to intestines and other organs.

Q: What can I do about heartworms, hookworms and roundworms?

A: Prevention is the best medicine. Call your veterinarian to schedule an appointment for a heartworm test if your dog has not already been tested in the last year. If your dog is negative, your veterinarian can prescribe a preventative that can be easily administered on a monthly basis; some are even in the form of treats which dogs love to take. Ask your veterinarian about products that also treat hookworms and roundworms. When used as directed, some medications offer 100% prevention of heartworm disease in dogs and costs as little as nickels a day.



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Call your veterinarian and schedule an appointment for a check-up today!