

ZOONOTIC POTENTIAL OF COMMON CAT/DOG INTESTINAL PARASITES

Intestinal parasites are of great concern for your cat or dog and your family. Consider these statistics;

- Nationwide, 34% of dogs are infected with gastrointestinal parasites. This increases to 54% for dogs living in the southeastern states.
- Roundworms (*Toxocara canis*, *T. cati*) and hookworms (*Ancylostoma* sp.) are present in almost all areas of the United States.
- Younger animals have much higher infection rates.
- Many different parasite eggs can thrive in the environment for years.
- 3-6 million people each year in the United States are infected by *Toxocara larva migrans*. The majority of these are children. Typically children become infected by putting soil/sand/objects that are contaminated with fecal matter into their mouths. They develop either visceral or ocular larva migrans.
- Hookworm larvae can penetrate human skin and cause a condition known as cutaneous larva migrans.
- Immunocompromised people are at greater risk for infection.
- Tapeworms cannot be transmitted from your pet directly to you. However, you can be infected by ingesting a flea, the carrier of the infective stage. Many cats and dogs are infested by fleas.
- *Toxoplasmosis gondii*, whose infective carrier is the cat, is of great concern to pregnant and immunocompromised people. More importantly is the infection of people through eating undercooked meat or improperly washed vegetables.
- *Giardia* sp. can be carried by both cats and dogs. It is potentially zoonotic to people.

Guidelines for preventing intestinal parasite infection:

- Deworm your pet on a regular basis as recommended by your veterinarian. The Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) has a good set of guidelines to follow.
- Have fecal exams done on your pet's feces 1-2 times a year. Have this done 2-4 times if under a year of age.
- Do not allow your pets to eat raw meat. Do not eat undercooked meat yourself.
- Practice good hygiene. Wash hand frequently, especially after handling pets or cleaning up pet waste. Make sure hands are washed before eating.
- Try to pick up pet waste daily and dispose of it properly. It is not a good idea to use dog or cat waste as fertilizer for your garden.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Keep pets flea-free. Use appropriate flea/tick preventatives.
- Wear shoes in areas where there are apt to be animal stools such as parks and playgrounds. Wear gloves while gardening.

- Clean litter boxes daily. Have someone else besides pregnant or immunocompromised people perform this task.
- Do not drink water from streams or other potentially contaminated sources. Provide your pet with fresh, potable water.
- Keep pets clean. Give them a bath after deworming.
- Administer heartworm products that also have activity against roundworms and hookworms year-round.