

Worming our Pets, why bother?

by Harriet Baxter, Chobham Road Vets in Sunningdale

Worm infestation in our dogs and cats is common and often they do not show any outward signs. However, they can cause significant disease in animals and sometimes people.

There are several different types of parasitic worm able to infect your pet in the UK and most dogs and cats are exposed to, and likely to carry a worm burden at some point. Coupled with increased international travel and the potential introduction of more dangerous parasites into the UK makes it more important than ever to keep your pets protected. So whilst this may not make nice reading, it is a subject worth understanding.



There are two major groups of worms:

- **Roundworms** – '**Toxocara**' being the main concern. Most common in puppies as can be passed on from infected mothers. Signs of infection range from poor growth and coat condition to stomach upsets and even pneumonia in puppies.
- **Lungworm** is another type of roundworm which is becoming more prevalent in the area. Is it most common in dogs but the prevalence in cats is increasing and we have recently had a case in the practice? It affects the lungs and the first symptom is often coughing or breathing difficulties. It can be fatal if left untreated. Other roundworms can affect the skin and small bowel (**hookworm**) and large bowel (**whipworm**)
- **Tapeworm** – These can be caught from eating contaminated meat (e.g. mice/rats) or from fleas. Signs vary from mild irritation around the rear end to anaemia and weight loss. These worms can pass from pets to humans and cause serious illness.

Most infection comes from the environment – some studies have shown that a shocking 67% of public playgrounds are contaminated with roundworms and their eggs. They are very resistant and can remain infective in the environment for years. Infection occurs in a variety of ways. Toxocara passes in the milk from bitch to puppies, hookworm burrow into the skin and tapeworm are picked up from fleas whilst grooming or scavenging raw meat.

Collecting dog faeces and regular worming are major factors which will reduce the risk of passing on infection to other dogs and people. It is also important that you choose a wormer that is protective against all stages of the lifecycle of worms. If you're not sure about whether you are using the correct wormer or if you want some more advice, then feel free to pop into the practice and chat to one of the team.