



WORM INFESTATION

The two main categories of worm affecting dogs are **roundworms and tapeworms**.

The commonest of the roundworms is *toxocara canis* — this is the one that gets a lot of publicity about being a health risk to children. They look like threads or strands of spaghetti depending on their size, and the largest roundworms can grow up to 18cm in length. Living on partially digested food in the dog's bowel, adults release microscopic eggs out into the environment in the dog's faeces — as many as 100,000 a day.

Tapeworms are made up of strings of long flat segments, and can grow even longer than roundworms; the most common is *dipylidium caninum*, which can reach up to 70cm in length. Using sharp teeth to attach themselves to the gut wall, they continuously produce new segments that are packed with eggs and which gradually break off, and are excreted with the dog's faeces.

Signs And Symptoms Of Worm Related Disease Include:

- Weight loss
- Scurfy and/or a dull dry coat
- Hunger
- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Constipation
- Lethargy
- Coughing
- Worms seen in vomit or faeces.

Even if there are no obvious signs of worms, it's still possible your dog has them, so don't wait for symptoms of infection to appear before you do anything

about it — by the time this stage has been reached, he'll have a heavy infestation and the worms will be doing their damage.

Treatment

Worming products are available in:

- Flavoured pastes
- Flavoured and chewable tablets
- Powder/granules
- Liquid suspension form (**recommended for puppies**)

Some spot-on monthly parasite control treatments will contain anti-worming properties. However, owners must be aware that most spot-on treatments will not provide the same level of worm control as traditional all-wormers.

As well as buying veterinary recommended products, such as Drontal and Panacur, other brands are available in supermarkets and on-line. It is advisable to check that these are as efficient.

When a wormer is given, although it removes worms already present in the digestive tract, it doesn't have a residual effect, but leaves your dog's system after a few days, so it won't prevent re-infection. This is why it's important to have a year-round programme in place.

Frequency of worming depends on the product you use, the age of your dog and your lifestyle. Puppies are generally wormed every two to three weeks from the age of two weeks until 12 weeks old, then monthly until six months old, after which every three months is usually sufficient.

Before giving a wormer, make sure you are giving the right dosage for your dog's weight; and as this can fluctuate with both age and activity, check it first.

You may prefer to use natural products, perhaps because your dog has health problems, or simply because you don't like the idea of using chemicals. There are alternatives to choose from, including giving garlic, neem or one of the many herbal and homeopathic preparations available. Remember that they will not have undergone the same safety and efficiency testing as the commercial products, so it may be a good idea to have stool samples checked periodically.

Prevention

A preventative strategy is as important as some form of regularly administered wormer; such preventative measures include scooping your dog's poo, both out on walks and in your garden to help minimize contamination. Try also to keep your dog from scavenging and his/her bedding should be regularly washed.