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THE POOP ON INTESTINAL PARASITES

Stool Sample

You should bring in a stool sample from your pet to the clinic at least once a year. We only need a piece of fecal material about the size of a quarter in order to run the test. A fresh sample is best, but if you cannot bring the sample to the clinic right away, you may bring it in at a later time as long as the sample is not dried out or frozen.

Fecal Exam

Your pet's stool will be examined under the microscope for the presence of parasite eggs. Since parasites shed eggs in cycles, it is possible that your pet's fecal exam will come up negative while he or she could still have an intestinal parasite. If symptoms of parasite infestation (such as loose stool) persist, the doctor may recommend retesting or giving your pet a de-worming medication empirically.

Prevention

Roundworms, Hookworms and Whipworms can be easily controlled by keeping your pet on heartworm preventative, Interceptor or Sentinel, all year round. It's also important to keep your yard free of stool and do not allow your pet to play in areas where they may come into contact with stool from other animals. Most pets become infested with intestinal parasites by walking through infected stool or somehow ingesting infested stool.

COMMON TYPES OF INTESTINAL PARASITES

Roundworms

Many puppies are born with this intestinal parasite since it can be passed on through the placenta or while the puppy is nursing. Dogs and cats can also become infested by ingesting the eggs from infested feces. Adult worms resemble spaghetti and may be seen in vomit or feces. If ingested by a human, roundworm eggs develop into larvae which can migrate through the body and cause serious problems. If larvae migrate to the eye, it can cause blindness. This is why it is **EXTREMELY** important to pick up your pet's stool after he or she defecates and practice good hygiene by washing your hands after handling your pet.

Hookworms

Hookworm is another common parasite found in dogs. Dogs can become infected through their mother, by ingesting eggs from infested stool or grass, or by walking barefoot in an area where there are hookworm larvae in the soil. Hookworm eggs can develop into larvae which then penetrate skin (the pads of your dog's feet) and go on to grow into adults in their small intestine. When in the small intestine, the parasite attaches to the intestinal lining and begins to feed. Hookworms feed on blood, which can cause anemia in some pets, especially young puppies. Like roundworm larvae, hookworm larvae have the potential to cause significant problems in humans. Hookworm larvae can penetrate human skin and instead of moving to the small intestine, they migrate around under the skin causing severe irritation and infections in the skin. Cleaning up after your pet and practicing good hygiene can reduce your chances of becoming infested.

Tapeworms

It is very rare to be able to detect a tapeworm infestation through a microscopic fecal examination. Diagnosis is made by observing tapeworm segments in the stool or around the anal area of your pet. The segments resemble grains of rice. Tapeworms are not passed directly from one pet to another. Instead, they require another animal or intermediate host before they are capable of infecting another animal. Tapeworm intermediate hosts are either fleas or mammals such as rabbits, mice or rats. If your pet ingests all or part of the previously mentioned animals, it is possible for them to get tapeworms.

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An oral medication can kill any tapeworms inside your pet, but getting rid of the source, for example fleas, is necessary to prevent re-infestation.

Whipworms

Whipworms are another common intestinal parasite for dogs, but they are rarely found in cats. Pets become infested when they ingest infective eggs from another pet's stool, soil or grass. Eggs are shed infrequently, so detection in a stool sample may be difficult, but once detected can be treated with an oral medication. Re-infestation is a major concern because whipworm eggs can survive in soil for several years. Picking up your pet's stool right after they defecate can drastically reduce the chances of your pet becoming infected again.

Coccidia

Coccidia are not worms, but one-celled organisms that can cause soft stools or diarrhea. Dogs and cats become infected when they consume stool containing eggs or lick surfaces contaminated with stool from an infected animal. Medications are typically given for 10 days and a stool sample should be rechecked once treatment is finished to confirm that your pet is clear of the parasite.

Giardia

Giardia is a one-celled protozoan parasite that can cause bloody or mucoid diarrhea especially in younger pets. It can be transmitted between humans and pets. Giardia lives in moist soil and water. It can be difficult to find Giardia on a routine fecal exam, so a special test might need to be performed if the doctor is suspicious that your pet has Giardia.