

Adult Cat Parasites

Animal Hospital Inc.

Clermont



Parasites are living beings, such as worms or insects that live on or inside your pet. They usually feed upon your pet, which can cause him or her to be uncomfortable, malnourished and (in extreme cases) may lead to death.

Intestinal Parasites

Intestinal parasites, such as hookworms, tapeworms and giardia, are a very common problem in adult cats. If your cat is an outdoor cat, indoor/outdoor cat, or recently adopted from an animal shelter, he or she is particularly at risk.

Symptoms

Symptoms of intestinal parasites include vomiting and diarrhea, poor condition of fur, and in extreme cases, death. However, some cats with parasites do not show these symptoms. Just because you do not see the worms does not mean that they are not there. It is important to realize these worms live in the intestines, so you will NOT see them in the stool of your cat unless they are dead or dying.

Diagnosis—Fecal Analysis

We recommend a routine fecal examine when you get a new cat, and then exams twice a year thereafter for cats that spend time outside. For adult cats, we use a sophisticated test involving a series of steps, including centrifugation and flotation. This advanced test provides much more accurate results than the simple flotation technique that most veterinarians use.

Please bring a small amount of stool with you when you bring your cat for vaccinations. If you have several cats sharing the same litter box, only one stool sample is needed. It is best if the sample is less than 24 hours old.

The fecal analysis shows if there are intestinal parasite eggs, toxoplasmosis eggs or single-cell parasites called giardia in your cat's stool. This is important to know because some parasites can infect humans when the eggs are being shed in the stool. It is also important to know that your cat can re-infect himself or infect other cats when eggs are being passed. For this reason, it is important to pick up all stools promptly and properly dispose of them if your cat has parasite eggs in the stool.

Please note that just because your cat's fecal analysis was negative (no worm eggs) at a previous visit, it does not mean that these parasites are not present. Due to their complex life cycle, worms may be present without shedding eggs. In a new cat, it is important to have at least three negative stool samples before we can assure you that your cat is free of all parasites. Cats that spend time outdoors should be tested twice a year (preferably spring and fall) for intestinal parasites.

Can intestinal parasites affect my family?

It is important for you to know if your cat is currently shedding eggs in his or her stool so you can protect your family. Humans, particularly children, can be infected with certain worms by ingesting (eating) the egg or larva (baby worm). This is only a concern if there are eggs in your cat's stool. Prompt removal of all stool and using proper hygiene can easily prevent any chance of infection.

If your cat is actively shedding parasite eggs, you should be as clean as possible in dealing with your cat. **It is also very important to pick up ALL stools to prevent accidental infection of a family member or re-infection of your cat.** If the stool is left in the yard, eggs can survive in for

more than a year and can contaminate soil even after the stool has degraded.

Tapeworms

While most intestinal parasites have a direct life cycle (meaning they pass directly from cat to cat), tapeworms do not. The tapeworm requires an intermediate host—an animal other than a cat—to complete its life cycle.

Two types of tapeworms are seen in cats. The first type is spread by the flea. A cat ingests a flea carrying the tapeworm while grooming, and the tapeworm then infects the cat. This type of tapeworm must be treated by treating both the worm itself AND the fleas. Otherwise, the fleas will continue to re-infect the cat with tapeworms.

The second type of tapeworms seen in cats uses rabbits and/or rodents as the intermediate host. If the cat kills and eats an animal carrying these tapeworms, he or she can become infected. Cats that hunt regularly may suffer frequent tapeworm infections. In some cases, routine treatment for tapeworms becomes necessary to keep the problem under control.

Diagnosis: Because tapeworms use an intermediate host and are not passed through the stool from cat to cat, the eggs do not always show up on fecal exam. Most of the time a tapeworm infection is diagnosed when an owner sees the worm segments (which look like a rice grain or a cucumber seed) near the anus or on the stool of the cat.

Treatment: Tapeworms require special medication for treatment. Routine wormers for other types of worms have no effect on the tapeworm. Once tapeworms are diagnosed the veterinarian will prescribe medication specifically for tapeworms. Remember that if a flea problem exists, it is also VERY important to treat the fleas at the same time to prevent re-infection.

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