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The Importance of Parasite Control

What you need to know to protect your family: both 2 and 4 legged members

Certain parasites not only infect your dog or cat but can also be transmitted to people. This is called parasite zoonosis. The three most common intestinal parasites are roundworms, hookworms, and tapeworms. This article will address some commonly asked questions and provide information on how to prevent zoonosis and keep your family members healthy.

Who is at risk?
Young children are particularly at risk because they are more likely to play in dirt or grass contaminated with worm eggs, are less careful about hygiene and more likely to put their hands or objects into their mouth.

How are worms transmitted to humans?
Children become infected by playing in dirt, grass, etc. contaminated with microscopic egss and then putting their hands in their mouth. Hookworms can penetrate the skin, and people can be infected by walking barefoot in a contaminated area. Humans can also become infected after cleaning litterboxes and not washing their hands afterwards.

Where could my children come into contact with contaminated soil?
Sandboxes and riding arenas are common places that outdoor or stray cats will defecate. Keeping sandboxes covered when not in use can help keep the neighborhood cats and raccoons from using your child's sandbox as a litterbox. Public dog walks are also likely to be contaminated. The backyard could be contaminated, especially if your pets are not regularly dewormed or if you have raccoons in the area. Raccoons can also transmit roundworms.

How do I prevent infection?
Several easy steps can be taken to prevent transmission of zoonotic parasites. Below you will find recommendations for prevention.

1) Puppies and kittens should be regularly dewormed. They should be seen by your veterinarian as soon as they are adopted. If the breeder or adoption agency has not prophylactically dewormed your new puppy or kitten your veterinarian should. If your puppy or kitten is diagnosed with worms, it may take several dewormings to break the life cycle and rid him or her of all worms. Obtaining a negative result on at least 2 fecals after deworming is recommended.
2) Adult dogs and cats should have a fecal checked at least every 6 months. Indoor dogs and cats are still susceptible to infestation because the microscopic eggs can be brought into the home when you walk through a contaminated area. The sooner we know they have worms, the sooner we can deworm them and lower the exposure to people.
3) Most monthly heartworm preventatives also help prevent roundworms and hookworms. Dogs and cats should be on these preventatives. Ask your veterinarian which product is best suited for your situation.
4) Remove feces from the yard at least 2-3 times a week. Daily is best to prevent contamination.
5) Cover all sandboxes when not in use.
6) Clean litterboxes daily and wash your hands afterwards.
7) Do not allow children to go barefoot, sit or lay down in playgrounds, beaches or parks.
8) Make sure children wash their hands regularly after playing with their pets or playing in the yard.
9) Keep your pets free of fleas. Fleas can transmit tapeworms to people. Some monthly heartworm preventatives not only help prevent roundworms and hookworms but also prevent fleas.