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## Internal Parasites

It is important to perform a microscopic evaluation of your pet's stool at least once a year. Not all parasites and/or their eggs can be seen with the naked eye. If you do see adult parasites passed from your pet, it indicates an extremely high burden of parasites that is affecting your pet's health. Some parasites are zoonotic and can be passed to you and/or your family.

**Whipworms** – These parasites live in your pet's large intestinal tract often causing bloody diarrhea and inflammation of the bowel. An unthrifty appearance and weight loss are common side effects of whipworm infections. Transmission of the parasites occurs from ingestion from a contaminated environment. Whipworms are very resistant and can persist in the environment for months to years.

**Hookworms** – These blood sucking parasites live in your pet's small intestine and can cause significant blood loss and inflammation of the bowel. Hookworms can be severely debilitating to all pets but especially puppies and kittens. They are transmitted by ingestion or penetration through the skin. Hookworms are considered to be a **zoonotic** parasite which means they can be passed to you and/or your children. Hookworms can persist in the environment for long periods of time.

**Roundworms** – These parasites live primarily in your pet's small intestine. They are relatively large worms, up to 10-12 cm in length, causing distension of the intestine which often leads to abdominal discomfort, interference with gut motility, and the inability to utilize food. They can also cause coughing, pneumonia, vomiting and diarrhea. The larval form of the roundworm can migrate from the stomach to the liver to the lungs where they are coughed up and swallowed again. Roundworm larva can also set up in muscles and become activated during pregnancy. Therefore roundworms can be passed from the dam to their offspring through the milk. Older pets may become infected by ingesting the eggs from a contaminated environment. These parasites are also considered **zoonotic** and can be passed from pets to people.

**Tapeworms** – These flat, white parasites live within the animals intestinal tract. They steal your pet's nutrition in order to survive. The eggs can be seen under the microscope or the segments (small, white, rice like segments) may be seen beneath the tail or stuck to the hair near the anus of the pet. Pets pick up these worms by ingesting fleas.

**Coccidia** – Coccidia is another parasite that lives in your pet's small intestinal tract. It can cause watery to mucoid diarrhea. Your pet can become dehydrated and weak. Coccidia can be hard to kill and may persist in the environment for up to one year. Coccidia is passed through the fecal to oral route.

**Giardia** – Giardia affects primarily your pet's small intestine. It prevents proper absorption of nutrients, damages the delicate intestinal lining, and interferes with digestion. The most common sign of infection is persistent diarrhea, with pale, greasy and occasionally blood tinged stool. Pets often ingest cysts from feces or contaminated water. Giardia is **zoonotic** and can be passed from your pet to you and your family.

If your pet has been diagnosed with intestinal parasites, try to pick up all fecal matter from your yard to help minimize re-infection. Often treatment now as well as in the future is necessary to eliminate parasites from your pet. Good hygiene is always important after handling any fecal matter.