

Internal Parasites: Whipworms

The Basics Of Whipworms

The most common worms found in dogs and cats are roundworms, tapeworms, and hookworms. Whipworms are less common, but they still occur widely in dogs and cats. Relative to their appearances in dogs, whipworms are rare in cats. They live throughout the United States. They have a small thin head with a body that gradually widens to end in a thick tail which contains the reproductive organs. They live in the large intestine and the cecum (at the junction of the large and small intestine). Whipworms feed on the blood of their host.

Whipworm Species

- *Trichuris vulpis* affects dogs.
- *T. campanula* affects dogs.
- *T. serrata* affects cats.

The Life Cycle Of Whipworms

In comparison to other intestinal worms, whipworms have a relatively simple life cycle. The adults attach themselves to the wall of the large intestine and cecum. They mate and pass eggs into the animal's stool. The eggs live and mature in the soil over a period of a month. They hatch when eaten by another animal. The whipworm larvae pass into the cecum and mature into adults. They burrow their heads into the wall of the large intestine and begin to feed.

Transmission of Whipworms

Animals become infested with whipworms by ingesting the infective eggs. They may lick eggs that stick to the fur or the pads of their feet when lying in contaminated soil. Dogs and cats may also ingest the infective eggs in a number of other ways. It is important to remember that the eggs take approximately thirty days to mature in the environment to be able to hatch and infest their host.

Symptoms Of Whipworm Infection

The symptoms of a whipworm infestation vary with the number of worms present. Animals with small infestations frequently display no signs at all. A larger number of worms can create inflammation of the intestinal wall. Sometimes a whipworm infestation can cause its host to become anemic through the loss of blood. This can be serious.

- Animals will appear weak and lethargic.
- The gums will become pale.
- Blackened stools may soon appear.
- Pets will become depressed.

Treatment And Prevention Of Whipworm

Whipworms are diagnosed through a fecal parasite exam. Simply bring in a small stool sample and we will prepare a specimen through centrifugation and examine it microscopically. The presence of whipworm eggs in the stool indicate a whipworm infestation.

If your pet is infested with whipworms, we will administer an appropriate deworming agent and repeat this four weeks later. Occasionally, after a treatment, you may observe dead worms passing in the stool for 24-36 hours. Whipworms are more resistant to deworming medications than most other intestinal worms. As such, sometimes a treatment plan for whipworms will involve more than two treatments. We recommend rechecking a stool sample several weeks after the final dose of medication. The symptoms associated with whipworm infestation will be treated on a case by case basis.

Possibility Of Human Infection From Whipworms

It is unlikely that the whipworms that affect dogs and cats will create extensive problems in people. However, people have a species of whipworm specific to them: *Trichuris vulpis*, the human whipworm.

For further information regarding the effects of whipworms concerning people, contact North Shore Veterinary Clinic at 847-966-3080.