

Lungworm in Dogs

Lungworm in Dogs: What You Need to Know

Lungworm is a growing concern for pet owners in the UK, and it can pose serious health risks for our furry friends. This condition arises when dogs or cats munch on infected snails, slugs, or frogs, and if left untreated, it can even be fatal.



What Exactly is Lungworm?

At its core, lungworm is caused by a parasitic worm that navigates through your dog's bloodstream, potentially affecting vital organs like the heart and lungs. It's a sneaky little invader that can cause a lot of trouble.



How to Spot Lungworm Symptoms

Detecting lungworm can be tricky because its symptoms can vary widely. Keep an eye out for:

- **Coughing:** If your dog seems to be coughing more than usual, take note.
- **Breathing Issues:** Struggling to breathe or showing signs of distress could be a red flag.
- **Lethargy:** A sudden disinterest in exercise or playtime can indicate something is off.
- **Loss of Appetite:** If your pup isn't interested in their meals, it's worth investigating.
- **Vomiting or Diarrhoea:** Digestive troubles can be another sign of trouble.
- **Weight Loss:** Unexplained weight loss is definitely concerning.
- **Prolonged Bleeding:** If your dog gets a minor injury and it seems to bleed longer than usual, that's another symptom.

If you suspect your dog might have lungworm, don't hesitate to call your vet for advice.



How Do Dogs Catch Lungworm?

So, how do our pets end up with lungworm? It's often through consuming larvae found in infected snails, slugs, or frogs. Sometimes, your dog might accidentally ingest these larvae if they're on a toy or even in their fur.

Once inside, the larvae grow and mature, eventually making their way to the heart and blood vessels. This can lead to serious complications, including heart issues and pneumonia. In some cases, the infection might go unnoticed at first, but after about 28 days, the adult worms begin producing their own larvae, which can create significant health problems.

The effects can be severe, leading to haemorrhaging in various organs, including the lungs and liver. If not treated, the condition can be fatal, but the bright side is that lungworm is often treatable when caught early.

While dogs can't spread lungworm directly to each other, they can pass the larvae through their faeces, which then infects slugs and snails. This cycle makes it easier for the disease to spread.

Preventing Lungworm

To keep your dog safe from lungworm, have a chat with your vet about regular treatment options, especially if you live in or travel to southern England or South Wales, where cases are more common.



Here are some tips for prevention:

- **Regular Anti-Parasite Treatment:** Your vet can recommend the right worming treatments that cover lungworm. Make sure to follow their guidance on frequency.
- **Discourage Snail and Slug Eating:** Try to prevent your dog from snacking on slugs, snails, or frogs when out and about.
- **Change Water Regularly:** If your dog has outdoor water bowls, make sure to change the water frequently.
- **Stay Vigilant:** If you notice slugs or snails in your garden or local parks, keep a close watch on your dog and reach out to your vet if they seem unwell.

Testing for Lungworm

If you suspect your dog might have lungworm, your vet will start by asking about any symptoms you've noticed. They might perform a blood test or examine a stool sample under a microscope to look for the presence of lungworm. However, this method isn't always reliable since lungworms may not show up in every sample. In more severe cases, an X-ray can help reveal any abnormalities in the lungs.

Treatment Options

The good news is that most dogs recover from lungworm with early diagnosis and treatment. The specific medication will depend on how severe the case is. However, a few dogs may experience lung scarring afterwards. If left untreated, lungworm can cause serious inflammation, internal bleeding, and even organ failure, potentially requiring more extensive treatment. So, as always, prevention is better than cure.



Can Humans Get Lungworm?

The short answer is no; lungworm isn't known to infect humans. However, other types of worms like roundworms and tapeworms can be transmitted from pets to people. That's why regular worming (at least four times a year) is crucial. Additionally, some tapeworms can be transmitted through infected fleas, so don't forget to keep up with flea treatments as well!

By staying informed and taking proactive measures, you can help keep your beloved dog safe from lungworm and other pesky parasites. If you ever have concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to your vet!