

Eye Worm in Dogs

Eye Worm Danger to Dogs: What You Should Know

Vets in the UK are warning dog owners about a growing threat from **eye worm**, a parasite that's becoming more common in Europe. Although the risk of infection is still very low in the UK, especially for dogs that haven't traveled abroad, it's important to be aware of the symptoms and potential dangers.



What Is Eye Worm?

Eye worm (scientific name: *Thelazia callipaeda*) is a parasitic disease spread by **fruit flies**, which are very common in the UK. These flies carry the parasite and infect dogs (and other mammals, including cats and humans) when they land on the eye and lay larvae that feed on tears. While it's still rare in the UK, there have been cases in dogs imported from Romania, Italy, and France.

In some cases, you may even see the tiny worms moving on the surface of your dog's



eyeball.

Symptoms of Eye Worm

Signs that your dog may be infected with eye worm include:

- **Red, sore eyes** (similar to conjunctivitis)
- **Swollen eyes**
- **Mucus** around the eyes
- **Excessive tearing** or watery eyes
- **Eye ulcers**
- **Visual impairment**

However, not all dogs show obvious symptoms. In some cases, you might see the worms directly on their eye, but the infection could also go unnoticed until more



severe signs develop.

Where Is Eye Worm Most Common?

Eye worm is becoming more prevalent in several European countries, including:

- France
- Italy
- Switzerland
- Germany
- Spain
- Portugal

- Croatia
- Romania

In some places, such as the Basilicata region in Italy, infection rates have soared, with over 40% of dogs affected. The parasite thrives in **oak woodlands** and is most active in **late summer** and **early autumn** when the weather is warm.

Can Eye Worm Be Prevented?

Yes, there are preventive measures! Some of the **anti-parasitic products** already used to protect dogs from other pests can also help guard against eye worm. It's a good idea to check with your vet to ensure your dog is properly protected, especially if you're traveling to areas where eye worm is common.

If you're taking your dog abroad, make sure their **worming and flea treatments** are up to date, which is also required for a pet passport. Even though some dogs have contracted eye worm despite following the UK's pet travel scheme, the risk remains low. Still, it's wise to be extra cautious when traveling to countries with known infections.



How Is Eye Worm Treated?

If your dog does get infected, treatment typically involves:

- **Cleaning the eyes** to remove any visible worms or larvae, usually done under sedation or anaesthetic.
- **Eye drops** and **antibiotics** to clear up the infection, which usually resolves within seven days.

Prognosis for Dogs with Eye Worm

If caught and treated early, dogs should make a **full recovery** without any lasting effects. However, if left untreated, there is a risk of **permanent blindness**.

Can Humans Get Eye Worm?

Yes, in rare cases, humans can contract eye worm, but the risk is extremely low. There have been reports of human infections in Spain, Italy, France, Croatia, and Serbia. As long as infected dogs are treated promptly, the chances of it spreading to humans are minimal.

In summary, while the risk of your dog catching eye worm is still small—especially if they haven't traveled abroad—it's important to be aware of the symptoms and take preventive steps. If you're planning to travel with your dog to areas where the parasite is common, talk to your vet and stay vigilant for any signs of infection.