

Intestinal Worms in Dogs

Types of Intestinal Worms



There are four primary types of intestinal worms that pose a risk to dogs in the UK:

1. **Roundworms:**

- **Species:** *Toxocara canis* and *Toxascaris leonina*.
- **Appearance:** Long, white, spaghetti-like worms.
- **Lifecycle:** *Toxocara canis* larvae migrate through the body, moving from the intestines to the lungs and back, while *Toxascaris* has a simpler lifecycle.
- **Symptoms:** Can cause illness but often asymptomatic.

2. **Hookworms:**

- **Characteristics:** Short, blood-sucking parasites that can be fatal to puppies due to nutrient depletion.
- **Lifecycle:** Similar to roundworms, moving into the lungs before re-entering the intestine.
- **Prevalence:** Less common in the UK but present in Europe.

3. **Whipworms:**

- **Habitat:** Live in the large intestine.
- **Impact:** Extract fewer nutrients; rarely cause severe symptoms unless they burrow into intestinal tissue.

4. **Tapeworms:**

- **Appearance:** Flat and segmented, often resembling grains of rice.
- **Habitat:** Reside in the small intestine, absorbing nutrients as food is digested.
- **Transmission:** Can be contracted through infected fleas or by eating infected animals.

How Dogs and Puppies Catch Intestinal Worms

- **From Their Mother:** Roundworms and hookworms can infect puppies in utero or through mother's milk.
- **Ingesting Contaminated Soil:** Eggs shed in feces can contaminate soil, where they can remain viable for years.
- **Walking on Contaminated Soil:** Hookworms can penetrate the skin through contact with infected soil.
- **Eating Infected Animals:** Dogs can contract worms by consuming rodents or scavenging carcasses.
- **Fleas:** Tapeworms are transmitted when dogs ingest infected fleas.



Symptoms of Intestinal Worms

Symptoms can vary based on the type of worm but may include:

- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting

- Swollen abdomen
- Lethargy
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Dehydration
- Coughing (notably in roundworm and hookworm cases)
- Blocked intestine (in severe cases)

Diagnosis

The only reliable way to diagnose intestinal worms is through a microscopic examination of faeces to detect eggs. Therefore, regular prevention is crucial.

Transmission to Humans

- Humans can contract roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms, but cases are rare.
- Toxocariasis, a condition caused by roundworms, can lead to mild symptoms in humans, and in very rare cases, severe complications.



Treatments for Worms

- **Regular Deworming:** Essential, especially for puppies and households with children.
- **Medication:** Various treatments are available, including injections, tablets, or spot-on treatments. Consult your vet for the most suitable option.

- **Repeat Treatments:** A single treatment may not eliminate all worms, as new larvae can enter the intestines post-treatment.
- **Additional Treatments:** If your dog is exposed to slugs or snails, ask your vet about lungworm prevention.

Prevention

- **Worming Frequency:** Puppies should be wormed regularly until six months old, while adult dogs should be wormed at least four times a year. Pregnant or nursing females may require special treatments.
- **Hygiene Practices:** Always clean up after your dog and dispose of feces properly to prevent contamination.

Cost of Worming

Annual costs for preventative treatments typically range from £40 to £60, a worthwhile investment in maintaining your dog's health.

By staying informed and proactive about intestinal worms, dog owners can help ensure the health of their pets and the safety of their families. Regular veterinary consultations and good hygiene practices are key to effective prevention and management.