

# Is your pet at risk for parasites?

Guelph, ON – The term “worms” is often used to describe gastrointestinal parasites (parasites that affect the digestive system) in our dogs and cats. Even though some gastrointestinal parasites are in fact “worms”, there are other gastrointestinal parasites that put our pets at risk that are not worms at all!

## How do you know if your dog or cat is at risk for gastrointestinal parasites?

Any dog or cat can become infected with a gastrointestinal parasite, including pets that live indoors. Sometimes, dogs and cats can even get gastrointestinal parasites from an unlikely source (like a flea!).

However, gastrointestinal parasite infections tend to occur more commonly in young animals, animals with compromised immune systems and animals who hunt or spend a great deal of time outdoors.

## How will you know if your dog or cat has a gastrointestinal parasite?

An infected dog or cat may display signs of stomach upset, such as vomiting or diarrhea. If there is a heavy infection, worms may even be visualized in the vomit or feces. Other possible signs may include weight loss, poor hair coat and pale gums. However, in many cases your pet may not be showing obvious clinical signs. This is why it is important for your veterinarian to perform regular fecal examinations for your pet, which can detect if gastrointestinal parasites are present. These examinations are important, even if your dog or cat has taken “deworming” medications in the past.

## What role does your veterinarian play?

Your veterinarian will discuss your pets’ lifestyle and behavior to recommend appropriate control measures and can check to see if your pet has an existing infection. A small sample of your pet’s feces will be needed for examination under a microscope as the parasites and/or their eggs are too small to see with the naked eye. Your veterinarian can then determine the appropriate parasite treatment program to ensure your pet remains happy and healthy.

## Keeping pet owners healthy

Pet owners should also remember that it is always important to ensure proper hygiene by washing hands with soap and water after outdoor activities, handling pets and disposing of pet feces.

Be sure to schedule a regular veterinary examination to assess your pets’ health and determine which parasite control measures will help ensure your pet lives a long, healthy life.

### Contact:

Colleen McElwain  
Canadian Animal Health Institute  
519-763-7777

A dog or cat infected with a parasite (such as roundworm, as shown here) may or may not display clinical symptoms. That’s why it’s important to have your veterinarian perform a regular fecal examination on your pet.

