

Being Vigilant — Worming Puppies

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I placed the order by phone with the catalog company. With a new litter of four on the ground I want to be vigilant about worms. The nice lady asked me, “Will that be the two ounce size or the sixteen ounce size?” I hesitated and took the plunge, “16 ounce please.” And although I just have four puppies now, there may be another litter in the fall. Besides that, the adults must be wormed too. The standard puppy wormer takes care of only large roundworms and hookworms, both disgusting to contemplate. But they are the most common and so the ones I’ll talk about in this column.

According to Mike Richards, DVM (American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists), “most dogs have roundworms (*Toxocara canis*) at some time in their life.” Roundworms live in the digestive tract and compete directly with your dog for sustenance. Symptoms include eggs and worms present in the feces; diarrhea, respiratory distress, general weakness, dull or scruffy coat, swollen abdomen and signs of malnutrition.

The issue for puppies is that roundworms have an insidious life cycle. Once they infect a host, they can encyst and live dormant in body tissue until triggered to journey elsewhere. This is how bitches infect their young pups. Even though they’ve been treated, the medication does not affect the encysted worm. Once it “wakes up” its larvae can then migrate to fetuses in utero or be transmitted through mother’s milk to the newborns.

So it’s important to start deworming puppies starting at 2 weeks of age and to continue every two weeks until they are twelve to sixteen weeks old. I use pyrantel pamoate—Nemex 2™. Mom should be dewormed too about two to three weeks after whelping. Veterinary guidelines recommend then continuing once a month from 3 to 6 months of age. According to Dr. Richards, once dogs grow up it is unusual for them to have persistent roundworm.

Dogs can pass millions of roundworm eggs in their stool which can then live for several months in the environment. So it’s possible to be in an area contaminated with eggs even though it seems clean. These eggs can then develop into larvae which can then infect your dog, or an intermediate host. Rodents, even earthworms can harbor roundworm. So can people. So good hygiene is important. Wash hands frequently and don gloves for gardening. Scary!

There are several species of hookworms, the most prevalent being *Ancylostoma caninum*. *Uncinaria stenocephala* prefers dogs residing in colder climates and *A. caninum* likes it better down south. Hookworms have big mouths and bigger appetites. They grab on to the intestine and feed on blood causing anemia, which can be fatal especially in puppies. Signs to look for: weight loss, poor coat, black or tarry looking stools, diarrhea, general lassitude and weakness.

Hookworm eggs in the environment develop into infective larvae which can pass directly through skin—a good idea not to go barefoot because humans can get hookworm too. Children are especially vulnerable. Hookworms don’t develop into adults in humans but cause problems as they migrate around.

Hookworm can also pass through mother's milk and through infected feces. Basic husbandry involves cleaning up stools daily to prevent the spread and preventive medication.

The American Association of Veterinary Parasitologists (AAVP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention each maintain websites with valuable information regarding parasites — worth a visit to learn more.

Worms are one of the most common problems affecting puppies and adults. But fortunately with some care can be managed as a basic part of ongoing healthcare. It's a good idea to check with your veterinarian regarding the most common types of worms found in your particular locale and treat accordingly. Monthly tabs like Sentinel TM (milbemycin oxime-lufenuron) prevents heartworm, flea populations, adult hookworms, roundworms and whipworms. My Norwich tolerate this very well. The best advice then is regular deworming and to scoop the poop! An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

— Leandra Little, AKC Gazette Breed Columnist

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