

Dog Checkups & Preventive Care

Pets, Parasites, and Protecting the Family



Just the thought of parasites makes most people cringe. Yet it is estimated that 34% of all dogs in the United States have some type of intestinal parasite. Worse yet, the [CDC](#) reported that 14% of Americans showed evidence of having been infected with the [roundworm](#) toxocara. That's right: people can get roundworms, and other parasites, from their pets or from the same sources our pets get them. Besides being creepy, parasites pose a real health problem to people and pets.

What pets are at risk?

All dogs and cats are at risk for parasites. External parasites like [fleas](#) and [ticks](#) are usually easy to spot if you know what to look for. You can also tell often that your pet has fleas because fleas frequently cause scratching, chewing and hair loss. (Watch this video for more on [protecting your dog from fleas and ticks](#).) It is harder to know if your pet has internal parasites, like [tapeworms](#), [roundworms](#), hookworms and whipworms. Sometimes, pets with internal parasites will scoot on their rear end, vomit, have diarrhea, or lose weight unexpectedly, but often their symptoms are nonspecific and overlooked.

The best way to find out if your pet has internal parasites is to take them to their veterinarian yearly. Your vet will examine a stool sample under the microscope to look for microscopic eggs, larvae, and parasites. They will also test your dog's blood for heartworm disease and/or other parasites. It's important that anytime you bring a puppy, kitten or new pet home, you have them checked by your veterinarian right away to be sure that they won't be exposing your other pets or family to parasites.

Why should you care?

Since parasites often go undetected, you may wonder why you should care about them? Although parasites can sometimes be asymptomatic, they remain a common and important cause of disease in pets. Fleas can cause skin irritation, skin infections, and even [anemia](#) in young animals. Ticks are an important disease vector for people and pets, and can spread [Lyme disease](#), [Rocky Mountain spotted fever](#), and [Ehrlichiosis](#). Intestinal parasites (worms) can cause vomiting, diarrhea, malnutrition, weight loss, and anemia. [Heartworm disease](#) can be very debilitating, and if left untreated, fatal. If these reasons aren't enough to make you worry about parasites, here's another: many of these parasites can make your family members sick. Children are the most vulnerable since parasites can be transmitted by the inadvertent or intentional ingestion of eggs found in soil and sandboxes.

What can you do to protect your family and pets?

Before you panic, you should know that parasites are usually easy to treat and even easier to prevent. In fact, many people may already be protecting their pets and family from internal parasites and don't even know it. Many heartworm preventatives also treat and prevent intestinal parasites like roundworms, hookworms and whipworms. Likewise, having your pet on monthly [flea and tick preventatives](#) protect them against fleas that transmit tapeworms and ticks that spread tick-borne diseases. Be sure to check with your veterinarian to find the best preventative products to protect your pets and your family and ask your veterinarian about screening your dog annually for parasites.

Although parasites are creepy and a common cause of morbidity in pets, preventing them is really easy. As a mother, I want to protect my children, but I also want them to grow up with animals. Fortunately, using monthly parasite preventatives year round and screening my pets annually, according to the [Companion Animal Parasite Council's Guidelines](#), gives me peace of mind by protecting my pets and family from parasites. Speak with your veterinarian to learn more about the best parasite prevention program for your pets and family or visit Pet Health Network's Beware the Bug page to learn more.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.

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Beware the Bug

Learn more about tick protection

[How to Check for and Remove Ticks](#)

[Preventives and Vaccines](#)

[Which Canine Vector-Borne Diseases Are In My Area?](#)

Or [learn more about dogs and parasites](#)