



# Milton Animal Hospital

## **Preventing and Treating Intestinal Parasites**

Perhaps your pet will never have intestinal parasites. But, unpleasant as it may seem, pet owners should be aware of worms and other parasites that can affect their animals' health.

Cats and dogs are the favorite nesting grounds of four principal groups of worms and a few species of microscopic protozoa. The four worms are roundworms, tapeworms, hookworms, and whipworms. Among the protozoa are coccidia, toxoplasma, giardia, and ameba.

Proper identification is vital. Unfortunately, in the case of parasites, identification isn't always easy because adult worms release their eggs sporadically. Knowing exactly what the problem is, is the first step in finding a solution.

It's very important to bring your pet's fecal sample (bowel movement) to your veterinarian as often as requested up to one year of age. Collect fresh fecal sample within 12 hours of an examination. It is also very important to keep the samples cool or refrigerated. A microscopic examination of the fecal sample will be performed to identify the worm's eggs.

An annual fecal check is also good preventive medicine.

Treatment begins once the specific parasites are identified. It's important to realize that different parasites will require different medications. Your veterinarian can administer the proper treatment for your pet. There are also some new preventive medicines on the market. Check with your veterinarian about whether these are appropriate for your pet.

Tapeworms are of special concern. Tapeworm segments resemble small pieces of rice. They are one of the few parasites that may be seen in a bowel movement or clinging to the hair near your pet's tail. If you notice these segments, carefully place them in a small container and take them to your veterinarian for positive identification along with a fecal sample. Several types of worms may be involved, and it is important to identify all of them for proper treatment.

Once identification is made, the proper deworming medication must be administered. With some intestinal worms, treatment of the environment also may be needed.

Most treatments take only a few days. However, periodic checking is necessary to be sure that all intestinal worms have been eliminated. A fecal sample should be reexamined about three to four weeks after the deworming. Your veterinarian may request an additional fecal sample at a later date.

Once the problem is treated, it makes sense to prevent reinfection. Bowel movements are the greatest source of most worms. To avoid worms, keep your pet away from areas where other animals have relieved themselves and dispose of bowel movements as quickly as possible in your own yard.

Under some conditions of poor hygiene, worms can be transmitted to humans. Discuss the risk of human exposure with your veterinarian.

A change in appetite, coughing, diarrhea (sometimes with blood), weight loss, a rough-dry coat, or just an overall poor appearance are symptoms caused by intestinal worms. If you suspect the presence of parasites, consult your veterinarian immediately. Sometimes healthy, well-fed pets do not show signs of intestinal parasites.

Always seek veterinary advice before deworming your pet.