

Parasites and Your Pet: Treatment and Prevention

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

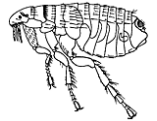
Parasites (fleas, ticks, and worms) can make your cat or dog sick. The good news is that you can protect your pet from parasites. It costs some money to prevent parasite-borne diseases--but it is cheaper to *prevent* an illness than to *treat* an illness!

FLEAS

The most common pet parasites are fleas. The height of flea and tick season is April-August, but fleas can cause problems all year. Fleas move fast, so they can be hard to see in your pet's fur. Look for flea dirt in the area where your pets sleeps. Flea dirt looks like black specks, but when you rub it with a damp paper towel, it shows as a reddish smear.

Fleas can make your dog or cat very itchy, lose their hair, and lose lots of blood. In addition, fleas can carry tapeworm eggs. If your pet eats a flea that is carrying tapeworm eggs, your pet can get tapeworms. If your pet has tapeworms, you will notice small, hard, seed-like particles where your pet sleeps.

You can treat a flea problem with flea collars, powders, sprays, shampoos, and dips. However, these treatments must be repeated often in order to work. **The easiest and best way to prevent fleas is to use a monthly “spot-on” topical medicine.** A few drops on your pet's neck is all it takes to kill fleas for one month.



Topical flea products you can get at your vet's include Frontline, Top Spot, Revolution and Advantage. Or, you can purchase them a bit cheaper from websites such as www.medi-vet.com or www.petmeds.com. Frontline and Hartz topical products are available at PetsMart. The website www.DrsFosterSmith.com offers cheaper spot-on products such as *Bio Spot*, *Defend* (for dogs only) and *Gentle Touch*. These cheaper products may not work as well as the ones you can get from a vet.

**Remember: It's cheaper to prevent your pet from getting fleas
than to hire exterminators to get rid of them!**

TICKS

Another common parasite is the tick. Ticks can cause diseases in your pet such as Lyme disease. Some flea treatments, like *Revolution* and *Frontline*, also kill ticks. If you live in an area with lots of ticks, you may want to buy the inexpensive product *Killtix* from your vet. The easiest way to remove a tick from your pet is to grab it with tweezers and gently pull it out. Be sure and pull out the tick's head, too! After removing the tick, apply some alcohol to the spot.

HEARTWORMS

Heartworms are deadly worms that are carried by the mosquito. If an infected mosquito bites your dog, your dog can get heartworms. Heartworms are long, thin worms that actually live in the pet's heart. Heartworms cause blocked blood vessels, breathing problems, bleeding problems, and heart failure. Your pet will eventually die from heartworms unless treated for it. Both dogs and cats can get heartworms. Heartworms in cats are more rare, but can be even more deadly.



The only way to prevent heartworms is to give your pet a monthly dose of heartworm medicine. You can buy tablets, such as Heartgard, or Revolution, which you apply to your pet's neck. Heartworm preventatives are available from a vet or from an online source such as www.medi-vet.com or www.petmeds.com (1-888-PetMeds). You do need a vet's prescription to order heartworm preventatives online. Also, you must have your pet tested for heartworms before starting him or her on a preventative.

Some heartworm preventatives protect your pet from other parasites, too. For instance, Revolution protects your pet from heartworms, fleas, mites, intestinal worms, and the American dog tick.

OTHER WORMS

There are four other types of worms that live in the intestines and make dogs and cats sick. The most common is the *roundworm*. Most puppies and kittens have roundworms. Pets with roundworms may have a "pot-bellied" appearance, vomiting, and poor growth. Puppies and kittens should be tested for worms when they get their shots. If untreated, roundworms can kill baby animals. Adult animals can also get roundworms. *Hookworms*, *whipworms*, and *tapeworms* are similar to roundworms. Diarrhea, dehydration and weight loss are the most common symptoms. Sometimes you will see worms or parts of worms in your pet's bowel movements, around the anus, or in their bedding. Your vet can test babies and adults for worms. It is not very expensive to test and treat your pet for worms.

MITES

Mites are so small that they are hard to see. Some mites cause a serious skin problem called mange (a disease that causes itching, hair loss, and sores). Ear mites are a common problem in both dogs and cats. They produce a buildup of very dark, waxy matter inside the ear and cause itching. An animal with ear mites will scratch at its ears and may shake its head a lot. Your vet can give you inexpensive medications to treat mites.