

Worming your Pets

There are two broad categories of worms that may affect our pet dogs and cats : intestinal worms and heartworms (please see our heartworm sheet for more information).

Worming is one of the first health care issues pet owners need to address, as pups and kittens are the most susceptible. As their name suggests, intestinal worms are parasites that live inside your pet's intestines. These worms range in size from small to surprisingly large (up to 18cm in length). Regardless of their size however, they all have negative and potentially deadly effects.

Most species of animal, as well as humans, can be infected with intestinal worms including dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, fish, birds and reptiles.

Common intestinal worms found in Australian pets are...

- Roundworm
- Hookworm
- Whipworm
- Tapeworm

If your pet has a large number of worms, they may find it difficult to maintain body condition and will lose weight. In some cases worms can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and even anaemia (a low red blood cell level). Occasionally, heavy intestinal worm burdens can cause death.

Worms sometimes have complex lifecycles which involve a period of existence and development outside your pet. Understanding the life cycle of a specific worm is important so that strategies for treatment and prevention can be designed and implemented. For instance, some tapeworms need to pass through fleas to complete their lifecycle, so flea prevention is an important method of controlling tapeworms.

It is important to maintain a routine worming treatment for your pets, to reduce the incidence of infection and to reduce environmental contamination. There are many worming treatments available for the various worm infections that occur in our pets. These are available as tablets, top-spots, or pastes. Re-infection is a common problem, particularly in pets that are in contact with a heavily contaminated environment. Another very important reason to worm your pets is to protect your family; as children in particular can become infected with certain dog and cat worms.

Below are some tips to consider regarding worm prevention:

- Promptly clean up pet faeces
- Practice good hygiene, always encourage children to wash their hands regularly (especially after playing in dirt or sandpits, playing with pets or prior to eating).
- Prevent children from playing where the soil may be contaminated.
- Keep your pet's environment clean.
- Always dispose of dog faeces in public parks and playgrounds.

Current worming recommendations in Darwin...

For puppies and kittens, worm with an intestinal all-wormer every 2 weeks, from 2 weeks of age until 16 weeks.

For dogs and cats over 16 weeks of age, worm with an all wormer every 3 months in the dry season and monthly in the wet season.

Indoor only cats can be wormed every 3 months all year round.

For dogs or cats that eat lizards or frogs, a high dose of tape worming treatment is recommended every 6 months. This is due to possible infection by tapeworm *Spirometra* (or "zipper worm") carried by these animals. This tapeworm can cause intestinal upsets and vomiting.

If you have any further questions about intestinal worming and how best to care for your furry family members, the vets and nurses at University Avenue Vet Hospital are here to help – just call us on 8931 0455.