

Hookworms

- Hookworms are internal parasites that live in the small intestines of dogs and cats.
- People can be infected with hookworms when a hookworm larva penetrates their skin or when they unknowingly swallow infective hookworm eggs.
- Signs of hookworm infections in pets may include pale gums, tarry diarrhea, poor coat, lethargy, and failure to gain weight.
- Hookworm infections can be diagnosed with a veterinary fecal exam.
- Several antiparasite medications can be used to treat hookworm.
- To protect your pet from hookworms, administer a monthly preventive that includes an antiparasite medication for hookworms and schedule regular fecal exams at least once or twice a year.
- To protect your family from hookworms, remove pet feces from the yard promptly and dispose of it properly. If you have a sandbox, keep it covered when children are not playing in it.

What Are Hookworms?

Hookworms are internal parasites that generally live in the small intestines of puppies, kittens, dogs, and cats. These worms attach to the intestinal tissue and suck blood and other nutrients from their hosts.

How Do Pets Become Infected With Hookworms?

Infected mother dogs can transmit hookworm larvae to their puppies during nursing. These larvae migrate through the puppy's body to the lungs, where they are coughed up and swallowed, finally arriving in the small intestine. Other larvae stay in the tissues of the body. Kittens are generally not infected this way.

Infected dogs also release hookworm eggs into the environment with their feces. In the environment, hookworm larvae develop into the infective stage and hatch from the eggs. When pets lie down in a contaminated environment, they can pick up hookworm larvae in their coats and become infected during grooming.

Hookworm larvae in the environment can also penetrate the pet's skin and travel through the bloodstream to the lungs. As in puppies, they are coughed up and swallowed, eventually arriving at the small intestine. Finally, pets can become infected with hookworms by eating infected animals, such as rodents, or insects, like cockroaches.

What Are The Signs of a Hookworm Infection?

Hookworm infections are most severe in young puppies, and, in large numbers, hookworms can be fatal. Signs of a hookworm infection include:

- Pale gums
- Dark, tarry diarrhea
- Thin, dull coat
- Failure to gain weight
- Lethargy
- Coughing
- Red, itchy skin lesions, especially on the paws

To protect your pet from hookworms, administer a monthly preventive that includes an antiparasite medication for hookworms and schedule regular fecal exams at least once or twice a year.

Can People Get Hookworms From Their Pets?

Hookworm infections are considered *zoonotic*, meaning that they can be transmitted from animals to humans. Typically, people are infected when hookworm larvae from the environment penetrate the skin. The larvae then migrate under the skin, resulting in a condition called *cutaneous larva migrans*. People with this condition may experience itchy skin lesions with a snakelike pattern.

Common Conditions

Occasionally, ingested larvae may migrate to the intestine, causing abdominal pain. However, hookworms do not mature to adults in humans, and the infections usually resolve on their own.

To prevent human infection, pet owners should remove and dispose of feces from the yard and sandboxes as soon as possible. Gloves and shoes should be worn at all times while gardening.

How Are Hookworm Infections Diagnosed?

Your veterinarian can diagnose a hookworm infection by identifying hookworm eggs during a fecal examination.

How Is an Infection Treated?

Puppies and kittens are routinely treated every 2 weeks with an antiparasite medication that eliminates hookworms and other internal parasites, until they

can be placed on a monthly preventive medication. Because hookworms can cause anemia (decreased red blood cells), puppies with severe infections may require fluids, iron supplements, and blood transfusions.

Several antiparasite medications can be used to treat hookworm infections in adult dogs and cats.

How Can I Protect My Pet From Hookworm Infections?

Remove pet feces from the yard promptly and dispose of it properly. If you have a sandbox, keep it covered when children are not playing in it. If possible, keep cats indoors and dogs on leashes to keep them from hunting prey that could be infected with hookworms.

Ask your veterinarian about monthly preventives that include protection against hookworms. It is also very helpful to schedule regular fecal exams at least once or twice a year.