

THE FECAL EXAM

A microscopic examination of a recently passed stool will determine if your cat or dog has intestinal parasites. Some parasites, during their development, migrate through the lungs and blood vessels of a cat or dog. Symptoms of having parasites can be as varied as vomiting, diarrhea, anemia, bronchitis, bloated belly, listlessness, weight loss, and colitis. Puppies and kittens can be born with parasites transmitted from their mothers. The diarrhea, malnutrition and anemia caused by intestinal parasites, particularly hookworms, can be fatal to these young animals.

WHO NEEDS A FECAL EXAM? Puppies and kittens need a fresh stool specimen examined for parasites within the first four weeks of their lives. (To obtain a fresh stool specimen of a puppy or a kitten, you may need to separate it from its mother for an hour after feeding.) If you plan to breed your female cat or dog, have a fecal test and any necessary worming done prior to breeding. You can bring a stool sample to the clinic without bringing the dog or cat along. Ziploc bags, used margarine tubs, and baby food containers are all good for transporting the stool sample.

HOW FREQUENTLY SHOULD THE FECES BE EXAMINED? Adult cats and dogs need their stools examined in the spring and again in the early fall, unless advised otherwise. If a cat or dog is being treated for intestinal parasites, stool samples must be examined at three week intervals until two consecutive parasite-free stools are obtained. If your pet is being reinfected from the environment, you will be advised what treatment to pursue.

WHICH INTESTINAL PARASITES ARE IDENTIFIED? Protozoans (Giardia sp., Trichomonas sp., and Coccidia sp.) are detected. The roundworms (nematodes), ascarids, hookworms, and whip worms are identified on the basis of the eggs released into the animal's stool. Tapeworms must be seen on the pet by family members because the segments are passed intermittently and cannot always be found during a fecal exam. They (cestodes) can be recognized by the rice-like segments on the pet's fur or at the anus.

WHY DOES WORMING NEED TO BE REPEATED? Drugs used for worming kill only the adult worm. Because parasites, particularly roundworms, have complex life cycles, three weeks may elapse before the larvae mature into adults, enter the host's intestine, and shed their eggs into the feces. Parasites must mature before they can be detected and eliminated. You may also need to find and treat the source of infection. If you have this situation, you will be advised. Avoid over-the-counter preparations used to worm at home. At best, they are moderately effective only against ascarids. At worst, they may make you feel secure in believing your pet has been wormed of all parasites, causing you to ignore a potentially serious situation.

CAN OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS ACQUIRE PARASITES? It is possible for humans to be infected by ascarids, hookworms, and tapeworms. Prompt and careful disposal of animal feces and proper hygiene to avoid ingesting fecal contaminated materials is essential. Hookworm larvae can be avoided by not walking barefoot on larvae-contaminated ground. Most hookworm larvae are killed when the ground freezes in winter. However, hookworm eggs can readily survive most winter temperatures in Michigan and hatch and mature in warm weather. Keeping your pet parasite-free will protect your pet, you, and your environment.

ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE CAN BE ANSWERED BY CALLING OUR OFFICE.

PRACTICE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE, SURGERY AND DENTISTRY