PARASITES IN PUPPIES, KITTENS, ADULT DOGS AND CATS

COCCIDIA: Coccidia is a single-celled organism that infects the intestine. They are microscopic parasites that are detected on a routine fecal test. Coccidia causes watery diarrhea, which sometimes can be bloody. It can be life threatening to an especially young or small pet. Coccidia comes from fecal contaminated ground. They are swallowed when a pet grooms or licks the dirt off itself. Coccidia infections are common in young animals housed in groups (shelters, rescue groups, kennels, etc.). This parasite is frequently seen and is not necessarily a sign of poor husbandry. A routine intestinal parasite exam is done for any new puppy or kitten whether or not they are showing any signs. One important thing to keep in mind is that other pets can become infected from exposure to infected fecal matter. In most cases this is an infection of the young and the adult dog or cat will not be infected.

HOOKWORMS: This is a classical internal parasite of puppies. The other common parasites are roundworms, tapeworms and coccidia. Hookworms have special features that are of interest to canine owners: they suck blood, they can be transmitted to unborn pups and most importantly the can infect humans. The adult hookworm lives by sucking blood from the intestine. The eggs pass from that host to the environment where a new host will pick them up. The host (puppy or adult dog) becomes infected by skin
penetration through either the feet of belly or whatever part of the skin is touching the ground. Some species of hookworms can infect cats but this is not nearly as common as hookworm infections in dogs. Humans can become infected by contaminated soil or improperly washed vegetables, which are in the contaminated soil. Therefore, washing your hands frequently after handling a new puppy or kitten is very important. Also, pick up any fecal material your puppy or kitten passes to prevent skin penetration.

**ROUNDWORMS:** A lot of puppies are born with roundworms. They are passed from the mother and from infected soil. If a puppy vomits up a worm, chances are it is a roundworm. They are long, white and look like spaghetti. If you think you see one, it is important to bring it in for the veterinarian to identify. Fecal testing is important for puppies and adult dogs. For a parasite to be seen on a fecal exam it must be laying eggs and sometimes several fecal tests must be performed. **Roundworms can infect humans.** There are numerous deworming products on the market. Some are prescription and some are over-the-counter. Some heartworm preventative does provide a monthly deworming also.

**TAPEWORMS:** Tapeworms are caused by the ingestion of a flea. Only one flea has to be on your pet. They lick themselves and swallow the flea. It takes three weeks after the flea is ingested for the tapeworm segments to appear on the pet or in the stool. This parasite is hard to find during a routine fecal test. This is why most people will notice the tapeworm segments on their pet’s bedding or on the pet’s rear end.
WHIPWORMS: This parasite will embed itself where the small and large intestines meet. Diagnosing whipworms is challenging since the female whipworm only lays eggs periodically. Therefore, this parasite may not be seen on a routine fecal exam. We see this parasite in adult dogs and infrequently in puppies.

GIARDIA: This is a diarrhea illness caused by one-celled, microscopic parasite GIARDIA INTESTINALIS. Once an animal or person has been infected with GIARDIA INTESTINALIS, the parasite lives in the intestine and is passed in the stool. Because an outer shell protects the parasite, it can survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time. The Giardia parasite lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of organisms can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal. Giardia is found in soil, food, water or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. You can become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite; you cannot become infected through contact with blood. Giardia infection can cause a variety of intestinal symptoms, which include diarrhea, gas or flatulence, greasy stools, stomach cramps and upset stomach or nausea.

For more information on parasites in puppies go to www.capcvet.org