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PARASITES

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There are numerous internal and external parasites that can infect both cats and dogs. Below is a list of the most common types of parasites that owners should be aware of. We have also included some tips and advice on what you can do to help prevent and treat infection in your companion.

External Parasites

Fleas

Ticks

Ear Mites

Sarcoptic Mange

Internal Parasites

Heartworm

Roundworms

Tapeworms

Hookworms

Whipworms

Coccidia

Giardia

External Parasites

Fleas - Ah, the dreaded flea! These pesky little creatures can cause severe discomfort for your pets and for you. These small, brown, wingless insects feed off of the blood of their hosts. When they bite, they inject a tiny amount of saliva into the host's skin in order to prevent the blood from coagulating. Although some animals who have fleas may show little or no discomfort, many are very sensitive to the flea saliva and react with severe

scratching and discomfort. Prevention is the key in fighting the ongoing battle against fleas. One or two tiny fleas are all it takes to cause an infestation on your pet and inside your home. Fortunately, there are a number of products available over-the-counter to help protect your companion against these tireless pests.

Ticks - Ticks are another serious concern, especially in our area of the country. There are various breeds of ticks, some of which are relatively harmless and others which carry and transmit diseases to their hosts. Here in Oregon, our greatest concern is for the deer tick (also known as the black-legged or bear tick) which can spread Lyme disease and Ehrlichiosis, among other things. Deer ticks are very tiny (much smaller than wood ticks) and are often difficult to find in the fur of our companions. Because of this, using a preventative treatment which kills the tick before it can transmit disease is extremely important.

Ear Mites - Ear mites are much more common in cats than in dogs. These microscopic bugs infect the aural cavities and can cause severe discomfort and itchiness for the host. Ear mites generally produce dark brown or black dry debris which is often said to resemble coffee grounds. They are transmitted from an infected animal to a non-infected one through simple contact, so if one pet in a multi-pet household is diagnosed, generally all of the pets should be treated.

Sarcoptic Mange - Sarcoptic mange is the name for the skin disease caused by an infestation of the *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite and is most common in dogs. The female mites burrow into the skin in order to lay their eggs and the resulting larvae also move over the skin of the host. The movement of these mites is extremely irritating to most infected animals and causes severe itchiness and scratching, which leads to red, raw areas on the host's body. Mange mites prefer the areas of the body with less hair, causing the most discomfort in the groin, armpit, and ear tip areas of the infected animal. Sarcoptic mange is most often diagnosed via a "skin scrape" which is viewed under a microscope.

Internal Parasites

Heartworm - Heartworm disease is a serious and sometimes fatal parasitic infection that can affect both dogs and cats. In dogs, the worms live in the heart, as well as in the large blood vessels surrounding the heart and lungs. In cats, the worms are found in the heart, lungs, or pulmonary artery. The disease affects dogs much more frequently than cats,

but it is important to treat both species with a preventative. Heartworm larvae are transmitted to a host through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become carriers when they bite an infected animal. Heartworm disease is easily preventable and can be diagnosed through a simple blood test. Winters here in the Northeast have been becoming milder, allowing mosquitoes to survive longer outside. Also, because mosquitoes can live inside even when it is freezing outside, it is important to provide your pet with a heartworm preventative all year round. Revolution is a great preventative for cats and it also provides protection against a number of other internal and external parasites. Revolution is also a great preventative for dogs, as is Heartgard Plus. You can read more about these products below.

Roundworms - Roundworms are long, thin worms that can affect both cats and dogs. They are visible in both the stool and vomit of infected animals and are often said to look similar to thin pieces of spaghetti. Roundworms are common in puppies and kittens as they can be passed from the mother through the milk. In older pets, roundworms are contracted by ingesting the eggs shed by infected animals. Often, a cat or dog will pick up eggs from soil, stool, or grass on their paws and ingest them later when they are grooming themselves. The eggs hatch when they reach the stomach and the worms develop in the intestines. More eggs pass out through the feces of the newly infected animal. Roundworm infection can generally be diagnosed through a fecal examination done by your veterinarian.

Tapeworms - Tapeworms are relatively common in both cats and dogs. Tapeworm eggs are generally carried by rodents, rabbits and fleas. When an animal ingests any of these other hosts, they become hosts themselves. Tapeworm segments are passed through the stool and are said to resemble small pieces of rice. Often, when a cat or dog is infected with tapeworms, they will "scoot" on the floor to relieve the itching associated with the segments crawling on the skin around the anus. Tapeworm infections can also be diagnosed through fecal examinations.

Hookworms - Hookworms can affect both cats and dogs. As with most other intestinal parasites, hookworms are generally picked up by a new host either through the mother or through the ingestion of eggs in the environment. Severe infection can lead to anemia in some pets. Hookworm eggs can be seen on fecal examination, although the egg shedding cycle is not constant, so repeat analysis may be recommended.

Whipworms - Whipworms are gastrointestinal parasites that affect dogs. Typically, they become infected by ingesting eggs from the environment. The adult whipworms burrow into the intestines where they can feed on blood and tissue. This infection often causes the host to have diarrhea, which is sometimes bloody. Diagnosis is done through stool examination, but the whipworm eggs are not shed on a consistent basis so repeat analysis may be recommended.

Coccidia - Coccidia are intestinal protozoa that infect the small intestines. Coccidia are transmitted to a new host when they ingest either infected feces or an infected animal, such as a rodent. Although most coccidial infections can be fought off by the body's own defenses, some infections can become severe, causing watery and/or bloody diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration. Coccidia cannot be seen by the naked eye and can only be diagnosed through fecal examination.

Giardia - Giardia are one-celled organisms that infect the small intestines of both dogs and cats and which are often contracted through the ingestion of contaminated water. Often when an animal is infected with Giardia, they will have explosive, watery diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration and weight loss. Giardia can be diagnosed through special fecal examinations and laboratory testing.