

What are HOOKWORMS?

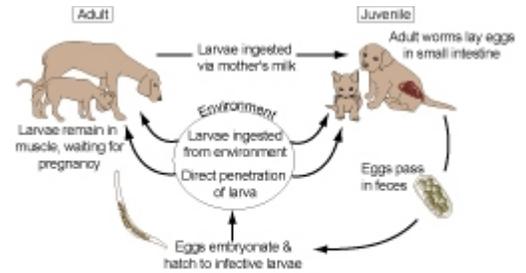
Hookworms are intestinal parasites of the cat and dog that get their name from the hook-like mouthparts they use to anchor themselves to the lining of the intestinal wall. They are only about 1/8" (3 mm) long and so small that it is very difficult to see them with the naked eye. Despite their small size, they ingest large amounts of blood from the tiny vessels in the intestinal wall. A large number of hookworms can cause life-threatening anemia.

How do dogs get hookworms?

Dogs may become infected with hookworms by one or all of four routes: Orally, through the skin, through the mother's placenta before birth (in utero), or through the mother's milk

Female hookworms pass hundreds of microscopic eggs in the feces of infected dogs, where they contaminate the environment. Larvae hatch from the eggs and can remain infective in the soil for weeks or months. A dog may become infected when it inadvertently swallows hookworm larvae, often by grooming its feet, or from sniffing feces or contaminated soil. The larvae may also burrow into the skin if the dog walks or lies on contaminated ground. Once in the host's body, the larvae migrate to the intestine where they mature and complete their life cycle.

If a pregnant dog had hookworms in the past, the pregnancy may reactivate dormant larvae, which then enter the female's bloodstream and infect the puppies in the uterus or through the mother's milk during nursing.



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What are the clinical signs of hookworm infection?

The most significant clinical signs are related to intestinal distress and anemia. The parasites anchor themselves to the intestinal lining so that they can feed on tissue fluids and blood, injecting an anti-coagulant substance, which can cause continued bleeding after the hookworm has detached from the feeding site. Pale gums and weakness are common signs of anemia. Some dogs experience significant weight loss, bloody diarrhea, or failure to grow properly with hookworm infection.

How are hookworms diagnosed?

Hookworms are diagnosed with a microscopic examination of a stool sample by a technique called fecal flotation.

How is a hookworm infection treated?

There are several effective drugs, called anthelmintics, which will eliminate hookworms. Most are given orally and have few, if any, side effects. However, these drugs only kill the adult hookworms. Therefore, **it is necessary to treat an infected dog again in about two to four weeks to kill any newly formed adult worms that were larvae at the time of the first treatment.** In rare cases, a blood transfusion may be necessary in dogs with severe anemia.

Since the dog's environment can be infested with hookworm eggs and larvae, **it is critical that you remove any feces from your yard promptly.**

Are canine hookworms infectious to people?

Adult hookworms do not infect humans; however, the larvae can burrow into human skin. This causes itching, commonly called "ground itch", but the worms do not mature into adults. More dangerous is the condition in which hookworm larvae migrate throughout the body, damaging the eyes and internal organs. Direct contact of human skin to moist, hookworm infested soil is required. Fortunately, this is extremely rare if normal hygiene practices are observed.

What can be done to control hooks and prevent human infection?

All puppies should be treated with a veterinary-approved anthelmintic product at two to three weeks of age. In addition, prompt deworming should be given if the parasites are detected. **Prompt disposal of dog feces should occur, especially in yards, playgrounds, and public parks. Strict hygiene is important,** especially for children. Do not allow children to play in potentially contaminated environments. **Frequent hand washing and bathing** are essential in preventing human infections.

Most heartworm prevention products contain medication to treat hookworm infections monthly.