



**Dogs and cats are at risk of infestation from a number of parasites. These can cause symptoms ranging from mild ill-health to severe life-threatening disease. They can also pose a threat to other animals and to humans in some cases.**

## Fleas

A very common problem throughout the year. The adult flea feeds on the blood of pets and can cause skin allergies, infections and blood loss (anaemia). Occasionally humans are bitten resulting in anything from a mild rash to severe allergic reactions. When swallowed, fleas can also transmit tapeworms to pets as well as humans (particularly young children).

After feeding off the blood of dogs and cats, the adult female flea lays her eggs which fall off the coat into places like carpets, furniture, bedding and skirting boards etc. Here they can remain dormant for many months. The eggs are activated to hatch into larvae by vibrations. The flea larvae feed off organic debris and eventually mature into adult fleas which jump onto passing animals...and the cycle is repeated.

**Fleas breed throughout the year in centrally heated homes. It is therefore important to maintain flea control programme throughout the year.**

If your pets spends any time outdoors it is practically impossible to prevent them coming into contact with fleas. The most effective treatments attack the adult and immature stages of the flea life-cycle.

# Parasities

## Worms

Worms are also a very common problem in dogs and cats.

### Roundworms

Most pups are born with worms and both pups and kittens can pick them up through their mother's milk. Worms live in the intestines of our pets and feed on blood and digested food. They lay eggs which are passed in the faeces and can remain infective in the environment for years. The eggs end up on the fur of passing animals and are swallowed during self-grooming. Children chewing dirty fingernails can pick up the worm *Toxocara*, which occasionally causes blindness, heart disease and epilepsy in humans. Adult roundworms look like pieces of string although they are seldom seen as they usually remain internally. The eggs are invisible to the naked eye. Therefore, without doing laboratory tests on the stool, it is difficult to know if your pets have worms or not.

**Female worms can each lay up to 20000 eggs per day!**

### Tapeworms

Dogs and cats pick up tapeworms by swallowing fleas infected with the tapeworm eggs or by hunting and eating infected prey (birds and mice). Tapeworm segments resemble grains of rice and may be seen around the tail region of infected pets. Although rare, the tapeworm *echinococcus* can be fatal to humans if the eggs are accidentally ingested.



### Heartworm

*Dirofilaria immitis* is a worm not found in the UK but it can be a serious threat to pets travelling abroad.

#### What can worms do to my dog?

Heavy infestations can result in:

- Vomiting and severe diarrhoea
- Loss of blood, weight and body condition
- Weakened immune system
- Pneumonia

Whilst lighter infestations may result in few if any external signs, infested dogs and cats remain a possible source of infestation to others, as well as humans.

### Mites

Dogs and cats may suffer infestation from a number of different types of mites.

#### Ear mites

These mites affect dogs and cats and, as well as being very irritating, can lead to inflamed and infected ears.

#### Mange (*sarcoptes*)

Dogs usually pick up this parasite from other infected dogs or foxes. It causes intense itchiness and irritation in dogs. Infestation with *sarcoptes* often leads on to severe skin infections.

#### Mange (*demodex*)

*Demodex* is another mite which affects dogs and burrows into hair follicles causing hair loss (alopecia) and itchiness. It can also be caught from foxes as well as passed on from mother to puppy.

#### Ticks

These are external parasites that attach to dogs and cats (and humans) and feed off their blood. This usually leads to irritation and discomfort at the site of attachment and blood loss (anaemia) in severe cases. More importantly they can transmit diseases such as Lyme disease which is capable of causing illness in both humans and dogs. For dogs travelling to the continent, ticks are known to transmit several other diseases including Babesiosis, Ehrlichiosis and Leishmaniasis. In the UK they are more of a problem in Wales and the West Country as well as around livestock.

#### Mosquitoes and sand flies

For dogs travelling to Mediterranean countries (France, Spain and Italy) these insects can transmit disease as yet not found in the UK (e.g. Leishmaniasis).

