

# Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

April, 2009

## Welcome

This issue will help you learn about a very common problem faced by pet owners of all types: parasites. Spring is here again, and now is the time to start protecting your pets against all the creepy-crawlies out there, if you do not already utilize year-round protection. Any questions can be addressed to a member of our staff, or you can contact us via email at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

## April: Parasite Prevention Month

There are external as well as internal parasites. Some of these can potentially cause death in young or immune-compromised pets, and many can be transferred to humans. Below, you will find information on what kinds of parasites are found in this area, how to tell if your pet has them, and how to prevent infection in your pets and your family. Ask a member of our staff what we recommend to remove and prevent contamination by parasites.

## External Parasites

External parasites are those that live on the outside of the body. The most commonly known are fleas and ticks, but there are other external parasites, such as mange, ear mites, and fur mites.

- Fleas: Fleabites cause small, raised bumps that itch, and can lead to flea-bite dermatitis and self-mutilation, inviting secondary infection. Fleas also commonly carry a type of tapeworm, and when the pet ingests a flea during grooming, it becomes infected with this internal parasite. Heavy infestations can cause anemia, and even death in young pets. Use an appropriate flea-prevention product to control fleas.



- Ticks: The American dog tick, the lone-star tick, and the deer (or black-legged) tick are all common in this area. A female tick can lay up to 20,000 eggs in her lifetime, and she can survive for years without a meal, so it is extremely difficult to eradicate the tick from the areas it likes to inhabit, such as wooded areas, and those with long grasses. Ticks are often carriers of diseases such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Erlichiosis and Tularemia, all of which can be transmitted to humans, and all of which have the potential to be fatal to both pets and people. The best ways to prevent tick infestation are to not allow your pets to roam outside of the yard, use an appropriate prevention product, and keep lawns trimmed.

- Mange: Caused by burrowing mites, we see two types in pets. One is Demodex mange, which is a normal inhabitant of canine skin, and is not contagious. Demodex often causes no problems for canines, but occasionally something sets off an allergic-type reaction, causing scratching and hair loss over the entire body. This mite cannot be effectively eradicated from its host, but reactions in sensitive canines can be managed. The other type is Sarcoptic mange; this type is contagious to other animals, including people. It also causes itchiness and hair loss, usually starting on the ears, elbows and abdomen of a pet. Fortunately, this type of mange is curable. Untreated, large areas of hair may be lost, and pets may mutilate themselves trying to stop the itching. There are monthly products available to remove sarcoptic mange.



- Ear mites: These mites are most commonly found in the ear canal, but they can actually live anywhere on the body. They cause itching, and many times dark coffee-ground-like material will be seen in the ear canal. These mites are highly contagious to other pets, including dogs, cats, ferrets, hamsters, guinea pigs and others. They are not known to affect people. If left untreated, ear mites can lead to such severe itching that the ear canal and ear drum may be permanently damaged. There are several products used to treat ear mites.

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- **Fur mites:** The most common fur mite is the rabbit fur mite, which infests rabbits, guinea pigs, dogs and cats. Although this mite does not infest humans, we may be bitten by them, and we may experience itchiness and a rash resulting from coming in contact with their secretions on our pets. These mites are visible to the naked eye, although they are often mistaken for small bits of dandruff. To remove this parasite, the veterinarian will have to give several injections of an antiparasitic agent, and all bedding and furniture the pet comes in contact with must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

## Internal Parasites

Most of the internal parasites that affect our pets live in the intestinal tract as adults, although many travel throughout the body as larvae. The notable exception to this is the heartworm, which lives in the pulmonary arteries and right ventricle of the heart. Most intestinal parasites are transferrable to humans, and many can lead to death of our pets in severe cases.

- **Heartworms:** These are transmitted via a mosquito bite. The mosquito bites an infected animal, and it ingests tiny larvae. These larvae grow a bit and are passed on to another animal when the mosquito next feeds. Early symptoms of a heartworm infection include becoming easily tired, while symptoms of a heavy infection include congestive heart failure, and sudden death. Because of the highly fatal nature of this infection, we recommend keeping your pets (dogs and cats) on a heartworm preventive year-round. Additionally, a blood test should be performed yearly, as the preventive only kills certain stages of larvae.



dogs and cats pass the larvae to their young through lactation. After weaning, the most common method of infection is through eating contaminated prey animals, soil or grass, in

- **Roundworms:** These are intestinal parasites that are highly prevalent in many different types of pets. Dogs may pass an infection on to their puppies before they are even born, and both

which roundworm eggs can survive for years. The developing larvae can cause respiratory distress, diarrhea, and death in young pets. Aside from the risk to our pets, there are over 750 cases of people contracting this parasite every year in the United States. Children are most at risk from this parasite. The best methods of prevention include using a monthly preventive, cleaning up all fecal matter in the yard, and making sure children wash their hands after playing with pets.

- **Hookworms:** This is another highly prevalent intestinal parasite that has the potential to infect children. These parasites are passed through lactation, fecal-oral contamination, and also by the larvae burrowing directly through the skin. The eggs can remain infective in the soil for months. The dangers to



pets include bleeding ulcers in the small intestine, as well as respiratory distress during the parasite's maturing migration. In children, intestinal problems are seen if the larvae are contracted orally, and if the larvae burrow into the skin directly from the soil, a creeping rash may form, causing intense itching. Several monthly preventive products are available to protect against this parasite.

- **Whipworms:** The third most common intestinal parasite found in dogs, but rarely found in cats. It is transferrable to humans, although this occurs rarely. All dogs are susceptible, and symptoms range from none to mucousy, bloody diarrhea, weight loss, and anemia. Often, these symptoms appear before any eggs are detectable in a stool sample, so if we suspect whipworms, we will recommend a "routine deworming" with a product that removes several types of intestinal parasites.

- **Tapeworms:** This infection, also transferable to humans, most often occurs when one animal eats another that is already infected, or when a pet eats a flea. It can be seen in any pet that eats meat or can harbor fleas, but most often it is seen in cats. Many infections are asymptomatic, and the first thing a pet owner will notice is small, rice-shaped pieces attached to the pet's fur or in the bedding. These are proglottids, body segments of the adult that contain eggs, and are regularly

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shed to continue the life cycle. There are no OTC products available for monthly control of these parasites, but if you notice these proglottids, your veterinarian can dispense a medicine to kill the parasites.

Also, be sure to use a flea preventative product, and keep cats from preying on wild animals.



- **Coccidia:** This is a one-celled parasite that frequently causes diarrhea, dehydration, weight loss and even death in young or immune-compromised pets. Most coccidia organisms are species-specific, meaning they cannot be passed from a cat to a dog, and vice versa. But one type, *Toxoplasma gondii*, can be spread to humans. This coccidial organism is found in cats, and is passed in the stool. If a person comes in contact with infected feces, he/she may become infected with *Toxoplasma gondii*. This parasite can cause numerous birth defects, if the infection occurs during pregnancy. Since this parasite is obtained by animals ingesting other infected hosts, or through soil or water contamination, the best recommendation is to keep your cats inside, and have a stool check done at least once a year.
- **Giardia:** This is another one-celled organism that causes diarrhea, dehydration and possibly death. It can infect any animal, including people, although the young and immune-compromised are more likely to experience severe symptoms. It is passed through ingestion of cysts from outdoor water sources. There is a vaccine available, but it is not intended to prevent animals from contracting the parasite; rather it causes fewer cysts to be shed, thus reducing the potential for further transmission, and it is not currently recommended by the American Animal Hospital Association.

**April Special:** Have a healthy pet exam done and bring in a stool sample during the month of April, and receive 50% off the fecal check. Up to a \$20 value.

There are many products available to remove and control different parasites. The next time you bring your pet in, be sure to ask a member of our staff to help you evaluate your pet's risk for different parasites. Or just send us an email. We can discuss with you the best prevention products to use for your individual needs. As always, we are happy to help!

**Upcoming Events:** Now is the time to sign up for our **charity dog wash** to benefit Elburn Woods, our local wildlife rehabilitation center. We will be offering discounted bathing, nail trims, ear cleaning, and anal gland expression. The date is set for Saturday, June 13<sup>th</sup>, so reserve your space now.

Also, start thinking about what costume your pet will wear to our **October Open House!** Yes, we are hosting another open house at our office, on Saturday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. Last year we had prizes for best costume, best family theme costumes, and a look-alike contest.

Thanks for your patronage. Our May newsletter will include information about exercising your pet, and helping to prevent (and reduce) obesity. Plus another special! If you have any questions or would like more information, go to our website at [www.elburnanimalhospital.com](http://www.elburnanimalhospital.com), or give us a call at (630) 365-9599. If you would like to opt out of receiving the Elburn Animal Hospital newsletter, please send an email to us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).