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## Zoonotic Disease

### **Be Aware of Who is at Risk**

Contaminated soil is the main source of infection for people. Children are especially at risk, because they often play in soil and put dirt and contaminated objects in their mouths.

### **How to Test for Intestinal Parasites**

A fecal sample can be checked to detect intestinal parasites. However, false negatives may occur when samples are too old, too small, or improperly preserved. Stool samples that are collected less than 12 hours before the time of testing give the most accurate results.

### **Zoonotic Intestinal Infections**

The most frequently diagnosed human gastrointestinal infection transmitted from pets is due to contact with the bacteria *Campylobacter jejuni*. This infection is contracted by ingesting food or water contaminated with feces from dogs, cats, birds and hamsters.

Human infection with *Toxocara* species, common **roundworms** of dogs and cats, occurs when people, especially children, ingest infective eggs from contaminated areas or items such as soil, hands, or toys. Infected animals may shed millions of eggs daily in their feces. Because these eggs are very resistant, they may last for years in environments such as a family's yard. Puppies have the highest rate of infection with *Toxocara* (90-100%). Even if a fecal exam is negative, you should still deworm puppies and kittens to ensure that they are worm-free. A lower percentage of adult dogs also carry these parasites.

Once the parasite eggs are ingested, they hatch in the small intestine and migrate to the liver, lungs, eyes and brain. Abdominal pain, respiratory problems, blindness or even death can result from these infections.

**Hookworms**, *Ancylostoma* species, are also very common in both cats and dogs. When a person comes in contact with an area contaminated by hookworm larvae, the larvae may penetrate the skin. The larvae migrate through the skin causing raised, reddish tracks. The common dog hookworm also migrates to the intestine in humans, causing inflammatory disease and abdominal pain. Hookworm larvae may easily be contracted, as they occur in damp, sandy soil, including shady areas under bushes, crawl spaces under houses and porches, in sandboxes, and on beaches.

According to a study conducted by the Merial Corporation, 39.21% of dogs in the Midwest carry hookworms, roundworms or whipworms.

## **How to Prevent Intestinal Parasites**

- clean up after your dog and cat
- cover sandboxes when not in use
- wash hands after handling animals or after having contact with their feces
- routine deworming according to your veterinarian's recommendation