

ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

Whipworms

Whipworms are a type of parasite that infest the colon. Cats are less frequently affected than dogs. Most pets become infected by exposure to infected feces or a contaminated environment.

Whipworm eggs can survive in soil for up to five years and are difficult to clear from the environment. Whipworms may not cause any symptoms, but infection frequently causes diarrhea, sometimes with blood or mucus in the stool. Severe infestations may also cause weight loss, lethargy and vomiting, or inflammation of an appendix-like structure called the cecum.

Dogs accidentally ingest worm eggs which hatch into larvae that burrow into the lining of the intestine for one week. These larvae then become young adults which migrate to the colon and embed themselves in the wall of the colon where they feed on blood and fluids. After the worms have been in the colon for about three months, they start to produce and shed eggs.

Whipworms are treatable with a deworming medication called fenbendazole. Multiple treatments are often needed due to the worm's long lifecycle and hearty eggs that can live for years in the environment. Recontamination can be decreased by using a monthly heartworm preventative such as Trifexis (milbemycin oxime); however, heartworm testing is required before starting a monthly preventative. Cleaning up stool in the yard immediately may help reduce further contamination of the environment.

Whipworms are not as common as some other parasites, but are sometimes found in dogs in York County. Having your dog's stool checked once or twice a year for any parasites will help control any whipworms or other intestinal parasites.

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