



**Good Friends  
Animal  
Hospital**

**D. Isabel Cole, DVM  
Ellen Kuchenbrod, DVM**

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## *Roundworms*

Roundworms, also known as ascarids, are the most common intestinal parasite in dogs and cats. The adult roundworm lives in the small intestine and eggs are passed out in the stool. The eggs undergo a period of development in the soil and then infect a new pet when they are ingested. Roundworm eggs can also be ingested by rodents, which serve as a transport host. This means that the roundworms don't undergo any changes within the rodent but wait until your pet eats the rodent and then the roundworms infect your pet.

After the eggs are ingested, larvae develop. The larvae do not stay in the intestine, but migrate through the tissues of the body undergoing changes. Eventually they migrate to the lungs, are coughed up and swallowed. Then the larvae develop into adults. Some of the larvae, as they migrate through the body, encyst in muscle tissue and stay there in a dormant state. These do not cause any problems. Pregnancy reactivates the dormant larvae. The larvae migrate through the pregnant dog's body and pass through the placenta infecting her unborn pups. Larvae are passed through the milk when the puppies and kittens nurse. Because of this, all puppies and kittens are born with roundworms and need to be treated for them.

Signs of roundworm infestation include a rough hair coat, potbelly, diarrhea, vomiting or a cough. Young puppies and kittens can experience an intestinal blockage from heavy infestations. Sometimes the worms are seen in stool or vomitus. There are several medications that treat roundworm infestations. The treatment must be repeated in 2 weeks because the medicine only kills the adults and none of the migrating larvae. A stool sample should be examined several days after the last treatment. Treat puppies and kittens at 2 weeks of age and then every 2 weeks until they are 8-10 weeks old. Some of the monthly heartworm medicines also control roundworms.

Roundworms are a threat to humans and can cause a disease called visceral larval migrans. The larvae migrate through the body, causing serious problems. Children are especially vulnerable. It is important to clean up well after pets that have the worms. The eggs are sticky which helps them to adhere to surfaces. A weak bleach solution (1:30 bleach to water) removes the stickiness and makes it easier to clean up surfaces in the house that are contaminated with feces. Eggs survive for a long time in the soil so the best you can do is to clean up stools as soon as possible. Don't allow children in areas used as a toilet by your dog and keep sandboxes covered so cats don't use them.