

- Should I deworm my cat that never goes outside?
Yes, since there is always contact with the outside world. By your muddy shoes or those of visitors, sand or dust blown inside by the wind, visits from other dogs and cats and so on. Eggs are microscopically small and easily carried around.

Deworming advice

Sensible, responsible dog and cat owners deworm their pets at least four times a year.

Dogs

- Puppies should be dewormed at the age of 2, 4, 6 and 8 weeks, followed by a monthly treatment until they are 6 months of age.
- Nursing bitches should be dewormed at the same time as their puppies.
- All other dogs should be dewormed in average four times a year and whenever worms are noticed.

Cats

- Kittens should be dewormed at the age of 3, 5 and 7 weeks, followed by a monthly treatment until they are 6 months of age.
- Nursing queens should be dewormed at the same time as their kittens.
- All other cats should be dewormed in average four times a year.

For more information about roundworms or deworming dogs and cats, please contact your veterinary surgeon. If you would like to know more about roundworm infections in humans, please contact your general practitioner.

Roundworm control in cats and dogs

In the interests of people and animals



What is a *Toxocara* infection?

Roundworms (*Toxocara*) regularly inhabit the intestines of cats and dogs. In most cases affected dogs or cats don't show any signs of infection. Sometimes adult roundworms can be noticed in vomit or faeces. They look like rubber bands about 10 cm long and their colour varies from light yellow to pinky-red. Your veterinary surgeon can verify an infection by examining a sample of faeces down the microscope. In humans, only the larvae (young worms) of *Toxocara* cause problems as they migrate into human muscle tissue and internal organs.

How does your cat or dog get infected?

Adult roundworms produce numerous eggs (up to about 200, 000 a day), which are excreted in the faeces. The eggs are invisible to the human eye and are not yet infectious. It takes a few weeks for the larvae to develop within the egg. Dogs and cats can become infected by ingestion of these infectious eggs. This occurs after licking their fur or ingestion of contaminated soil. Puppies and kittens can also ingest larvae via their mother's milk and puppies can even become infected before birth via their mother's uterus. That is why roundworms infect almost all young dogs and cats.

Symptoms of a roundworm infection in dogs and cats

In most cases roundworm infections are asymptomatic in dogs and cats but roundworm infection can lead to a general loss of body condition in your pet. Sometimes diarrhoea, vomiting, a dull coat and an occasional cough can occur. Infected animals maybe less active and the weakening of their immune system increases the risk of other infections.

How do humans (children) get infected?

Children can become infected by touching dog or cat faeces in the park, garden or sandpit- and then putting their contaminated fingers in their mouths resulting in ingestion of the roundworm eggs and larvae. In addition, eating contaminated, insufficiently washed fruit or vegetables can also cause infection.

What are the symptoms in humans?

Research has shown that approximately 19% of the Dutch population has previously been infected with *Toxocara*. After ingestion of the infectious eggs, the larvae are released in the intestines. They don't develop into adult roundworms, but the larvae migrate through the body and infest different organs. In most cases this migration goes unnoticed and there are no signs of illness but infection can sometimes cause flu-like symptoms. Occasionally lung or liver problems occur and in rare cases ocular problems such as blindness may develop. In children that are prone to allergies, an infection with *Toxocara* larvae is more likely to result in asthmatic and allergic symptoms. Children are at a higher risk of recurring roundworm infection than adults because they are more likely to come into contact with contaminated soil when playing.

How to prevent infection

All areas where dogs and cats are allowed to defaecate will be contaminated with roundworm eggs. To prevent infection, it is important to focus on personal hygiene and deworming dogs and cats!

1. Hygiene

Using common household detergents and disinfectants will not eliminate roundworm eggs. Therefore we have to minimise contact with infectious eggs:

- Carefully remove dog and cat faeces from the kennel, the litter tray, the garden and the sandpit. Caution: Do not throw animal waste in the compost bin.
- Make sure your cat uses the litter tray and clean it on a regular basis.
- Regularly clean your cat and dog's sleeping and resting areas (basket, floor, bedding and so on).
- Sandpits should be covered so cats and dogs cannot enter them.
- Always thoroughly wash your hands after gardening and after removing cat or dog waste.
- Keep your children's fingernails short and make them thoroughly wash their hands after playing and before they eat.

2. Regular deworming

Deworming a dog or cat should be done carefully and regularly. While deworming, bear in mind the following:

- Use a dewormer that is effective against roundworms; these are available from your veterinary surgeon or local pet shop.
- Deworm every dog and cat at least four times a year (even when you don't see any worms).
- Nursing bitches, queens and young animals (puppies and kittens) should be dewormed on a more regular basis (see deworming advice).
- Buy puppies or kittens that have already been dewormed following the ESCCAP recommendations.
- Write down every time your pet is dewormed, e.g. in the European Pet Passport or in the vaccination booklet.

Frequently asked questions

- My dog soiled the living room last night. Do I run a risk while cleaning it up?
No, roundworm eggs in fresh dog or cat faeces need several weeks to become infectious. So there is no direct risk of infection.
- When looking for a puppy, what does the term 'dewormed puppy' mean?
Dewormed puppies that are for sale are usually dewormed only once or twice. This should be repeated several times during their first year of life. Not all dewormers are appropriate for this purpose so check with your vet that an appropriate product has been used!
- Will all worms be eliminated after deworming?
No, roundworms for example are not killed by a dewormer that is only active against tapeworms and vice versa- so only treating one will not eliminate the other.