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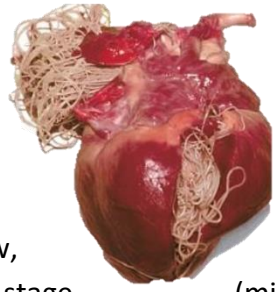
Parasite Risk, Disease, and Control in Southern Idaho

Southern Idaho has lots of creepy crawlies including heartworm! Some of these parasite diseases are new to our area while others are endemic. There a few different protocols and many drugs to help control parasites in our pets. Parasite control is not only important for the health of our pets but also for their humans! We let our pets live inside our homes, sleep on our beds, give us kisses, and snuggle on our couches. There are several parasites that can be transmitted to humans. Parasites cause disease and take a toll on our pets' health.

Parasites and their Diseases

Heartworm

Heartworm is a large roundworm (up to 14") that actually lives inside the heart and blood vessels of dogs and cats. The worms obstruct the chambers and vessels of the heart. They damage the lining of these areas causing severe inflammation which creates blood clots that can become embolisms. This disease is very difficult and expensive to treat. It is painful and is often fatal. Heartworms have a very complex life cycle. Microfilaria (microscopic larvae) are transmitted by mosquito bites. The larvae migrate to the heart and large blood vessels where they attach, grow, and reproduce. Preventative medications are aimed at killing the microfilaria stage (microscopic larvae in the blood stream) of the infection. It only takes 14 days for the microfilaria to develop into larger larvae that cannot be killed with preventatives.



- ✓ **LOW RISK in our area but *fatal*.**

Intestinal Parasites

- ♥ ***Roundworms***: Long round worms that live in the intestines. Can cause malnutrition, vomiting, diarrhea, gas, and/or decreased or increased appetite. These worms spread through microscopic eggs that are passed in the feces of infected animals. These eggs are very hardy and can live in the environment for up to 3 years. They also migrate through the liver, placenta, and milk of pregnant/nursing dogs and cats. Most puppies and kittens are born with roundworms. Humans can be infected with roundworms and suffer similar symptoms. Most commonly transmitted through "puppy kisses" -fecal oral route.
  - ✓ **HIGH RISK in our area.**

- ***Hookworms***: Short worms that are one of the most significant intestinal parasites of animals and humans. The tiny larvae penetrate the skin, travel through the blood stream into the lungs, are coughed up and swallowed, and then attach to the lining of the small intestines where they feed on blood. These nasty worms cause severe anemia as well as intestinal irritation. Microscopic eggs are passed into the feces. These eggs develop in moist areas and infective larval stages can survive in the environment for up to a month.
    - ✓ **LOW RISK in our area.**
- **Whipworms**: Small worms that live in the large intestine where they cause irritation and inflammation. Symptoms of whipworm infection include chronic watery diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, and weight loss. Microscopic eggs are passed through feces of infected animals where they can survive in the environment for up to 5 years. Larva take up to 6 months to fully develop and start passing eggs which makes diagnosing whipworm infections in young animals very difficult. Thankfully, whipworms do not seem to be very infectious to humans.
    - ✓ **MID RISK in our area.**
- **Tapeworms**: This flat, segmented worm requires an intermediate host, such as a flea, a bird, or certain species of rodents to complete their life cycle. Your dog or cat cannot get tapeworms directly from another dog or cat. They typically get them from eating rodents or fleas. This worm does not cause much disease for adult dogs or cats but can occasionally cause digestive upset in young animals. Tapeworms pass large egg packet segments that can be seen on the fur of infected animals. Tapeworms can be passed to humans via ingestion -fecal oral route.



    - ✓ **HIGH RISK in our area.**
- **Giardia:** Protozoal parasite with a complex life cycle. Lives in feces contaminated water. Causes diarrhea. Can infect humans and pets. No preventative medications available.
    - ✓ **HIGH RISK in our area.**
- **Coccidiosis:** Highly infectious/contagious protozoal parasite that causes bloody diarrhea. A dog or cat can be infected by eating infected mice, flies, cockroaches or other insects as well as infected dirt, water, or feces. Coccidia are host specific. No preventative medications available for cats and dogs.
    - ✓ **MID RISK in our area.**

External Parasites

- **Fleas** are tiny insects that survive by feeding on animal or human blood. Their bites can cause discomfort, itchiness, and irritation. Fleas can transmit diseases like typhus, plague, and cat scratch fever. Their pupal stages are very hardy and last in the environment for months.
    - ✓ **LOW RISK in our area.**

- **Lice** are flat, six-legged, wingless insects that can be seen with the naked eye. They don't move much or quickly like fleas. They spend their entire 21-day life cycle on a pet. Lice are host-specific. Human lice affect only humans. Dog lice affect dogs. Cat lice affect cats. Rarely, a dog or cat louse might end up on a human, but it doesn't stay there. Lice also cause discomfort, itchiness, and irritation. Some lice also suck blood which may cause anemia especially in smaller animals.
    - ✓ **MID RISK in our area.**
- **Mites** are microscopic insects that burrow into the skin and cause intense itching, redness, and skin crusts at the tips of the ears, elbows, hocks, chest and belly. A mite infestation is called "mange". There are several types of mites. Some are extremely contagious while others are natural inhabitants of skin. Mites are also host specific.
    - ✓ **MID RISK in our area.**
- **Ticks** are skin parasites that feed on the blood of their hosts. Ticks like motion, warm temperatures from body heat, and the carbon dioxide exhaled by mammals. The bite itself is not usually painful but can cause small abscesses, dermatitis, and itchiness. These parasites can transmit diseases such as Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, ehrlichiosis, anaplasmosis, and Lyme. Tick saliva can also cause paralysis in some mammals. There are many types of ticks. Pets (and other mammals) can bring ticks into human living areas.
    - ✓ **HIGH RISK in our area.**

Diagnosis

Most parasites have microscopic life stages that are not detectable by typical observation. Larger external parasites like lice and ticks can be diagnosed with a physical exam. Veterinarians typically utilize information from a good history combined with secondary symptoms to determine what tests might be most effective.

- Fecal Examination: 1gram of poop is mixed with a specific solution. The mixture is applied to a microscope slide then examined for parasite eggs and coccidia. A different solution can be used to look for giardia. Annual fecal exams are very helpful for monitoring efficacy of parasite control medications and drug resistance.
- Microfilaria Blood Exam: Small amount of blood is prepped on a microscope slide and examined for microfilaria (miniscule larvae).
- Antibody Tests: Blood sample is tested for antibodies produced in response to exposure to a specific disease.
- Skin Scrapings: Deep scrape of the skin is prepped on a microscope slide and examined for mites.



Prevention vs Treatment

Many pet owners are concerned about exposing their pets to drugs that prevent parasites. As a doctor, mother, and pet owner, Dr. Parish respects this position and admires the motive to take the best possible care of your pets.

Dr. Parish does prefer and recommend a proactive approach over a treatment approach purely with the motive of preventing an animal from experiencing discomfort and sickness. Dr. Parish has seen so many patients suffer from preventable diseases and it truly shreds the soul to know that it could have been completely avoided.

But medications are not for every patient. Dr. Parish will not give a pet a drug that may interact with other medications, worsen a concurrent illness, or if she is concerned about a patient's overall health. Preventative drugs, vaccines, etc are not for unhealthy patients -they are only for healthy patients at risk for those diseases. Every medical decision must be weighed for benefit versus risk.

If you are not comfortable with preventative medications or if your pet should not have these drugs, Dr. Parish recommends testing for parasites regularly (every 3-6 months) and only using medications as treatments.

Preventative Medications

The following are Dr. Parish's parasite prevention protocols. These recommendations are based on experience and research. If your prior veterinarians have prescribed other medications for parasite prevention, Dr. Parish is happy to research and approve online prescriptions. The following are the preventative products carried in our clinic.

Dogs

- ♥ **Proheart12** (1 year of age or older): Slow release injectable. One injection lasts 12 months. Prevents heartworm, roundworm, hookworm, and whipworms.
- ♥ **Simparica** (6 months of age or older): Flavored chewable that lasts 30 days. Prevents fleas, lice, mites, and ticks.
- ♥ **Bravecto** (6 months of age or older): Flavored chewable that lasts 12 weeks. Must be given with food for proper absorption. Prevents fleas, lice, mites, and ticks.
- ♥ **Simparica Trio** (8 weeks of age or older): Flavored chewable that lasts 30 days. Prevents fleas, lice, mites, ticks, heartworm (only if given every 30 days), roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms.
- ♥ **Interceptor Plus** (6 weeks of age or older): Flavored chewable that lasts 30 days. Prevents heartworm (only if given every 30 days), roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms.
- ♥ **Cestex** (7 weeks of age or older): Tablet. Lasts 30 days. Prevents/treats tapeworms.

- ♥ **Pyrantel** (<6 weeks of age): Flavored liquid that lasts 2 weeks. Treats/prevents roundworms.

Recommended Protocols

Adult Dogs ♥ Proheart12 once a year + Bravecto or Simparica

Puppies ♥ Simparica Trio every 30 days

Cats

- ♥ **Revolution Plus** (8 weeks of age or older): Topical. Lasts 30 days. Prevents fleas, lice, mites, ticks, heartworm (only if given every 30 days), roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms.
- ♥ **Cestex** (7 weeks of age or older): Tablet. Lasts 30 days. Prevents/treats tapeworms.
- ♥ **Pyrantel** (<6 weeks of age): Flavored liquid that lasts 2 weeks. Treats/prevents roundworms.

Recommended Protocols

Outdoor Cats ♥ Revolution Plus every 30 days + Cestex every 6 months (or as needed)

Indoor Cats ♥ Revolution Plus every 6-12 months

Gooding Veterinary Clinic's Online Pharmacy:

www.goodingvetclinic.covetruspharmacy.com