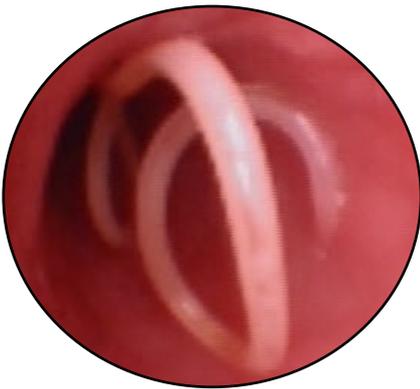


Worms in cats

Most puppies and kittens are born with worms, and people are familiar with the importance of treating for these internal parasites. Symptoms can be vague and mild, especially with minor infestations. However the range of worms seen across the UK is increasing, due to climate change, increased overseas travel, and changing life styles. These newer worms can cause more severe disease, and many can also affect people, so regular worm treatment is more important than ever.



Roundworm in the intestine

Roundworms

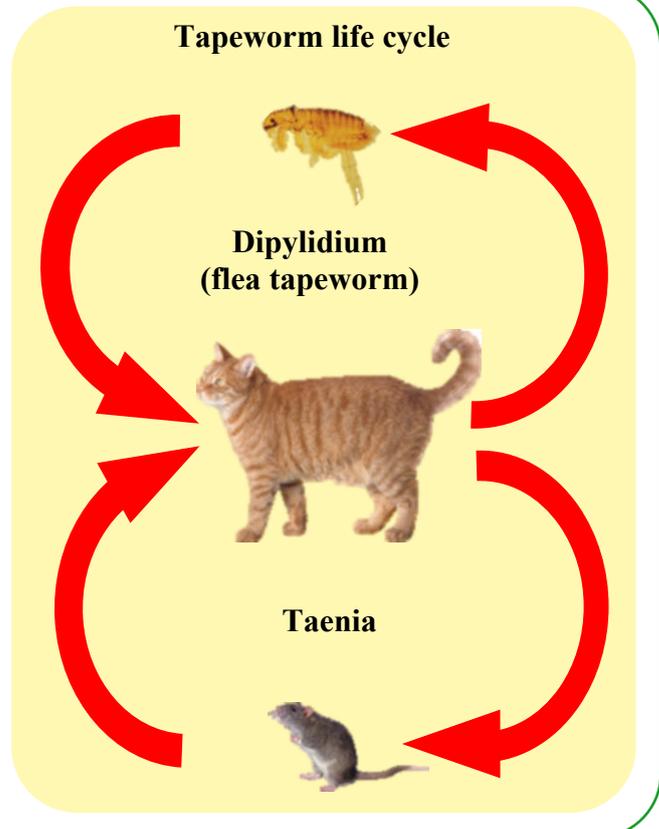
Roundworms are the most common internal parasite, and almost all kittens and puppies are born with them, as they are passed on by their mothers before birth, or in the milk. The worms live in the intestine, and pass eggs in the faeces which can survive in the soil for several years. These eggs then re-infest cats and dogs. Mild infestations may cause no signs, but heavy infestations will cause diarrhoea, weight loss, and a pot belly. These worms also occasionally infest people, when they can cause damage to other organs such as the eye and brain - especially in young people. Regular worming of dogs and cats especially when young, and standard hygiene proportions, will help to reduce the risk to children.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms are the other common worms seen in cats and dogs. They rely on an intermediate host for their life cycle. Eggs passed in faeces of the dog or cat are eaten by the intermediate host. The dog or cat then eats the intermediate host containing the immature stages of the worm. The most common tapeworm is *Dipylidium* - the flea tapeworm. The other common tapeworm is *Taenia* - for which the intermediate hosts are farm animals, rabbits and rodents. Hence flea infestations and hunting increase the exposure to these worms. These worms cause mild signs (diarrhoea, weight loss) in cats and dogs, but significant problems in the intermediate host, and so control is important to protect the agricultural economy.

Although these tapeworms do not affect people, a third tapeworm, called *Echinococcus*, will infest people causing potentially fatal damage to internal organs, especially the liver. *Echinococcus* is rare in the UK but more common in Europe.

Tapeworm life cycle





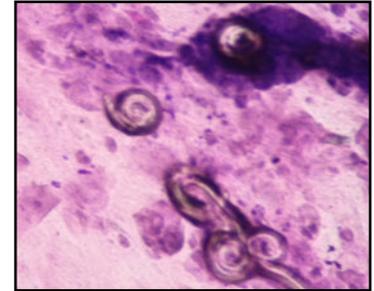
Hookworm

Hookworm is uncommon in the UK. Eggs passed in the faeces are eaten, or can pass through the skin of the paws. The adult worms attach to the lining of the gut, and feed on blood, so heavy infestations can cause anaemia.



Head of a hook worm showing teeth used to attach to the intestine lining.

Lungworm larvae in a lung wash



Lungworm and Heartworm

Lung worm affects dogs and cats, and can cause coughing and breathing problems. It is spread when pets eat infested faeces.

Heartworm (*Dirofilaria*) is found on the continent, and is spread by mosquitoes. Infestations cause heart failure, and regular treatment of animals going abroad is advisable.

Treatment

There is no treatment that covers all these worms. Treatment should therefore be based on the relative risk and seriousness of the different worms. For example, treatment against tapeworms is important for hunting cats, while pets going to France regularly should have routine treatment against *Dirofilaria*.

Frequency of worming also depends on risk of exposure, but we recommend treatment every three months on average.

	Roundworm	Flea Tapeworm	Taenia	Echinococcus	Hookworm	Lungworm	Heartworm
Johnson' s twin	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Bob martin spot-on		✓	✓	✓			
Worming granules	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Drontal cat	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Milbemax	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Stronghold spot-on	✓				✓		✓
Profender spot-on	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

For further information on the treatment of worms in cats please telephone the practice