

Thoughts on worming – preparedness and pitfalls

Gareth Harries, small animal vet and a partner of Wright & Morten, Macclesfield, runs through the challenges of different worms, and the types and frequency of treatment they demand



Gareth Harries

Wright & Morten

Worming of pets should be considered an essential routine to protect pets, the family in which the pet lives and the wider environment. But it is probably fear of a wriggly worm living within us that will be the strongest motivation for an owner to treat their pet!

The types of worms encountered in pets fall into two categories: roundworm

and tapeworm. The treatment required to kill these two varieties differs so it is rare that just one compound will suit all patients with all types of worms.

Toxacara has always been the main fear of dog owners, and perhaps more significantly parents of young children because of its zoonotic potential ie it can cause disease in humans as well as in their pets.

The eggs of these worms can last for years in the environment which means that



The new kid on the block is lungworm

the risk from these eggs remains long after an owner has failed to clean up the mess left by their dog. Studies have also identified eggs being carried on the fur of dogs, so stroking a dog could pass on infection.

In the pet, migration will lead the larvae back to the intestine while in the human body larvae will not successfully complete their lifecycle. They can move into tissues all over the body and cause serious illness. There is potential for larvae to migrate to the eye where they cause problems that might ultimately result in blindness. This is very rare but potentially catastrophic.

Mother Nature's wonderful merry-go-round is demonstrated by tapeworms. They have life cycles that will take them through more than one host. *Dipylidium* species use fleas as a means of entering their ultimate host. Flea larvae will eat the eggs in the environment and then, as pets groom, they ingest the flea, so passing on infection.

Taenia species will cycle through animals such as rodents, rabbits, and sheep, so cysts in uncooked meat will hatch in the dog or cat to cause infection. Infection with these worms in this country should be far less common as most of the infected meat

would be condemned and cooking would also destroy any cysts. Cysts can develop in humans so these might also pose a threat to owners.

LUNGWORM SPREADING

The new kid on the block is *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, commonly called lungworm. It was considered a rarity until relatively recently, and was certainly known to prefer some geographical locations so it would be far more commonly encountered in South Wales and the South West but cases are now reported throughout the country. While it is not as common as other worms, it is here to stay and the risk it poses is serious.

Cats pose a slightly different headache. They too are affected by roundworms (but not *Angiostrongylus*), and because they roam around and help themselves to the menu of wildlife in Nature's self-service restaurant, they do tend to pick up a few more tapeworms than dogs.

FREQUENCY OF TREATMENTS

The frequency with which owners should be advised to worm their cats and dogs comes down to their lifestyle, and perhaps which product is used. Cats that hunt successfully might need worming monthly, while the average cat might only need worming quarterly. Given that fleas will also pass on tapeworm, cats should always be wormed following flea infestations.

Roundworm treatments are perhaps most important for puppies who will be



infected by their mother and then re-infected almost constantly from their litter mates. Generally, worming monthly is the most commonly recommended schedule depending upon the product used, but some of the fenbendazole-containing products may well need repeating every two weeks. These products only kill intestinal roundworms and are not effective against tapeworm.

As dogs approach adulthood, resistance to infection becomes stronger so quarterly treatment is widely recognised as being appropriate for most dogs.

In households with young children, more frequent worming might be the best policy. The most common products for dogs contain praziquantel and pyrantel. These are generally considered to be excellent broad spectrum wormers, killing all but lungworm.

Prescription compounds also include Milbemycin. A number of spot on products are also available, with one of the prescription drugs for cats being a comprehensive treatment that may prove much easier for owners.

There is no single spot on product for cats and dogs that kills fleas, worms and ticks all in one go so a knowledge of separate treatments remains of immense value in order to best advise owners on the right product to suit their pet, their family, and our environment.

'Think twice before prescribing anthelmintics' *



* BVA advice

Offer your customers a complete, professional worming programme

- ✓ good profit margin
- ✓ results returned to your shop
- ✓ easy to do
- ✓ no upfront costs
- ✓ fast reliable results
- ✓ trusted award winning service

'positive interaction with your equine clients'

'builds great client loyalty'

'brings customers back into your shop'



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