

Whipworms

Whipworms, *Trichuris vulpis*, are an internal parasite that most commonly affect dogs but can occasionally affect cats especially in more tropical areas for the world. Whipworms are named after the characteristic “whip” shape appearance that they have. The front part of the body consists of a long thin filamented portion which looks like the lash portion of the whip and the back part of the body is thicker and resembles the handle of the whip. The adult worms are 4.5 to 7.5 cm long and approximately 75% of the worms’ body is made up of the long filamented portion. The whipworm eggs, seen under the microscope, are football shaped, yellow-brownish in color and have a smooth shell with prominent bipolar plugs on the end.



The eggs are unembryonated when they are passed in the animals’ feces. These eggs can last several years in the environment; even surviving extremes in temperatures and ultraviolet radiation. Host animals are infected when they ingest embryonated eggs from contaminated soil or other substrates. Eggs cannot be transmitted from mother to offspring. Larval stages then mature from the eggs in the animals’ small intestine and penetrate the mucosa (the lining of the intestine). It takes 2 to 10 days for the worms to develop and then they migrate to the animals’ cecum where they finish maturing into adult worms. The prepatent period for whipworms is 74 to 90 days. An adult whipworm can produce more than 2,000 eggs per day.



Whipworms are found in as many as 14% of shelter dogs in the US and 10 % of dogs seen in veterinary teaching hospitals in the US. Whipworms are seen worldwide. Most dogs are asymptomatic or have subclinical infections. Some dogs experience mild reactions with signs of diarrhea that can contain mucus or blood and a few dogs can experience severe infections with signs of bloody diarrhea, weight loss, dehydration and anemia. Whipworms are diagnosed through a routine fecal examination. Treatment of a Whipworms infection is performed with an oral dewormer given over a 3-4 month period. Several monthly broad spectrum heartworm preventative products are on the market that also control whipworms. Whipworms have not been known to affect humans and are not considered zoonotic.

If you have any further questions about Whipworms please feel free to contact us at (920) 668-6212 or send us an email at info@cgvet.com. You can also learn more information at www.veterinarypartner.com.