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Tapeworms (*Dipylidium Caninum*)

It is a very common type of worm found in the dog and cat.

The diagnosis is made by seeing the tapeworm segments in the faeces. It looks like small grains of “rice” on the surface of freshly passed faeces, or sometimes it “crawls” out of the anus.

Life Cycle

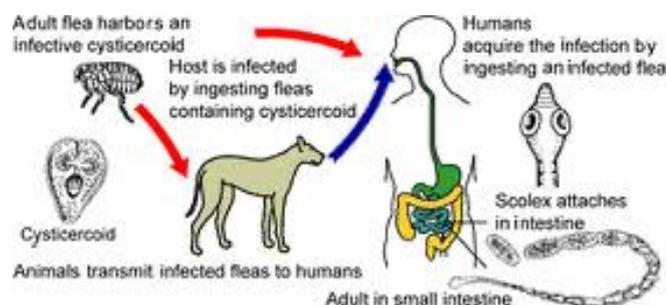
The adult tapeworm lives in the small intestine of dogs or cats. It is hooked onto the intestinal wall by a structure called a rostellum, which looks like a hat with hooks on it. The tapeworm also has six rows of teeth and uses that to grab on to the intestinal wall. Most people are confused about the size of a tapeworm because they only see its segments, which are small - the entire worm is usually 15cm or longer.

Once attached to the intestinal wall, the tapeworm begins to grow a long tail. The tapeworm’s body consists of a head segment, a neck, and many tail segments. Each tail segment is like a separate independent body, with an independent digestive system and reproductive tract. The hosts’ digested food gets absorbed through tapeworm’s skin. Older segments are pushed towards the tip of the tail as new segments are produced by the neckpiece. By the time a segment has reached the end of the tail, it is basically just a sack of tapeworm eggs.

The sack is passed either via the host’s faeces or sticks to the host’s rear end. The segment is the size of a rice grain and is able to move. Eventually the segment will dry and look more like a sesame seed. The sack breaks and tapeworm eggs are released. These eggs are not infectious to mammals. The tapeworm must reach a specific stage of development before it can infect a mammal.

Eggs are eaten by grazing flea larvae or lice, where the tapeworm develops into an infective stage for dogs and cats. When your pet licks and cleans itself, it swallows the flea with the infective tapeworm.

Inside the host’s stomach, the flea’s body is digested and the young tapeworm is released. It finds a spot to attach and the life cycle starts. It takes 3 weeks from the time the flea is swallowed until tapeworm segments appear on the pet’s rear end or in the faeces.



Clinical symptoms

The parasite does not harm the pet in any way as there are plenty of nutrients passing by to serve both the host and its tapeworm.

Sometimes it causes:

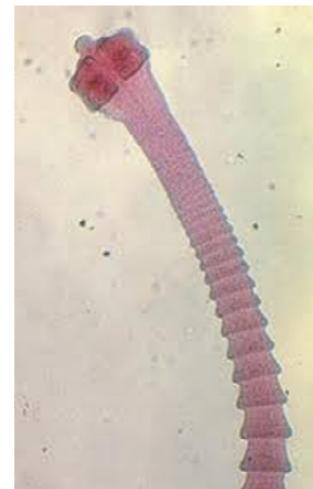
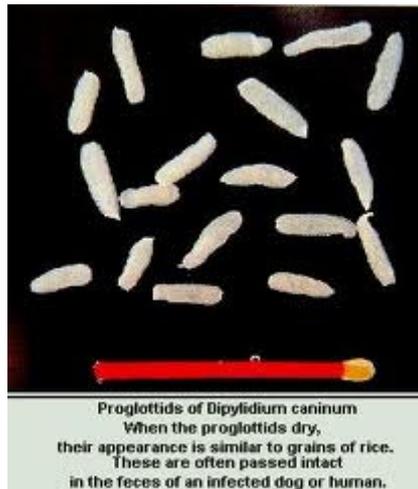
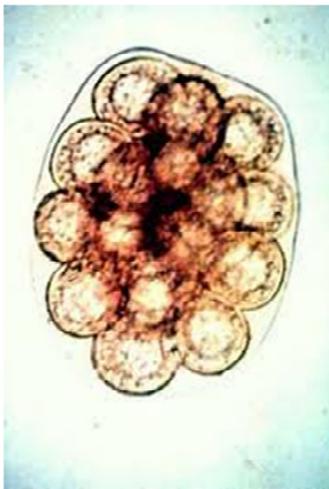
- Abdominal discomfort
- Nervousness
- Itching around the anus, dogs rub their rear end along the ground. (scoot)
- Vomiting and weight loss

In Humans

People can only be infected if they swallow an infected flea.

Treatment

Treat all in contact dogs and cats with an effective worm remedy. Only one treatment is necessary to kill the tapeworms in the body. Flea control might take some time, so it is possible for your pet to swallow infected fleas after the initial deworming. We recommend another deworming 3 weeks later.



The other White Tapeworm (TAENIA Species)

There are other tapeworms besides *Dipylidium*, whose segments might be seen on a pet's anal area or on their faeces.

- *Taenia hydatigena* which infect dogs when they consume undercooked livestock or venison or feed from carcasses).
- *Taenia taeniaformis* which infects cats when they consume rats and mice.
- *Taenia ovis* which infects dogs after they consume dead sheep or undercooked lamb.
- *Taenia multiceps* which infects dogs that eat the brains of infected sheep.
- *Taenia crassiceps* which infects dogs when they consume rats and mice.
- *Taenia serialis* and *Taenia pisiformis* which infects dogs when they consume dead rabbits.

Life Cycle (TAENIA Species)

The life cycle starts in the dog or cat's intestines. The worm can be very long (up to 1 meter) and is made up of segments. These segments (called proglottids) are passed with the faeces into the world where an unsuspecting intermediate host (mouse, rabbit, sheep, etc.) swallows it.

The young tapeworm hatches in the new host's intestines and escapes into the blood supply *with the next stop being the liver*. The larval tapeworm wanders through the liver, leaving bloody tracks behind it and ultimately falls into the abdominal cavity of the host. There it forms a sack. After about two months of development in this sack, it is ready to infect a new host. When a dog or cat eats this host with the infected tapeworm sack, the whole life cycle starts again.

Treatment (TAENIA Species)

Normal worm remedies from your veterinarian is effective against these infection

Do not feed raw or undercooked offal to your pets. Do not feed raw fish to your cats.

General tips on preventing worm infestation

In animals

- Deworm your pets *every 3 months* with a broad spectrum effective worm remedy
- Keep your animals and their bedding free from adult and immature fleas as fleas transmit tapeworm to the pet and family!
- Do not feed raw or undercooked offal to your pets – many tapeworm species are transmitted via infected meat and complete their life cycle in the dog and cat. Do not feed raw fish to cats.
- Remove faeces at least twice a week from the environment and clean out litter trays daily.
- Any *new pet* should be examined by a veterinarian for parasites and other signs of disease. All pets should be routinely examined at least once a year for parasites and to receive their yearly vaccinations.
- *Puppies and kittens* should be dewormed from two weeks after birth.

In humans

- Do not allow children to play in areas where dogs and cats defecate.
- Wash your hands well after handling pets.
- Teach children to wash their hands before eating and not to play with pets whilst eating.
- Deworm family members at least 2-4 times a year with a broad spectrum anthelmintic. Seek advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

Deworming guidelines for Cats and Dogs	
Kittens & Puppies	Every 2 weeks until 3 months, then once/month to 6 months of age and then 4 times/year
Adult Cats & Dogs	Treat regularly, every 3 months
Breeding Cats & Dogs	Treat all queens/bitches before mating and again 10 days before young are born
Lactating Cats & Dogs	Lactating cats/dogs should be treated concurrently with the kittens/puppies
Newly acquired kittens, puppies, cats and dogs	Should be treated immediately and repeat after 2 weeks and then follow the guidelines above