



## Our Best Friends: Parasite prevention

### Description

# The importance of protecting pets against parasites

By **Vanessa Rose**

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*This is the fourth in a series of articles on pet care called **Our Best Friends**, written by **Vanessa Rose**, founder and owner of [Les Anges Gardiennes](#) pet care services. Vanessa trained as a Veterinary Technician and has over 16 years of experience in providing professional pet care.*

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It seems inevitable that most dogs or cats will contract a parasite of some form during their lifetime. As animal lovers and devoted pet parents, there are steps we can take to protect our pets by effectively recognizing, treating, defeating and even preventing parasites. As long as we remain informed, we can keep our pets (and ourselves) safe, happy and loved.

First, it is uncommon for parasites to cause long-term complications unless they are left untreated. While it is important for you to be able to recognize when your pet has contracted a parasite, you do not have to rely solely on your own perception. The best way to handle parasites is prevention. Make sure you schedule **regular veterinary appointments** for standard check-ups and ask about establishing a **year-round parasite prevention program**. Your veterinarian will be able to help you select the best prevention program for your pet's unique needs.

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In this article, I will cover the importance of treating your pets for a vast variety of parasites, the types of parasites and their related diseases, as well as additional measures you can take to protect your pet inside your home.

## The parasite prevention program

Before starting a parasite prevention program, you should always ask your vet about the best course of action for the specific needs of your pet. After a check-up, if a parasite is detected in any form, a vet may recommend



more frequent treatments in addition to a medication suitable for your pet.

Some important things to note in reference to parasites are:

- Both puppies and kittens should be treated regularly and early on for *Toxocara Canis* (also known as *dog roundworm*). Treatments should take place every two weeks during the first two months, and then once every month until they reach the age of six months.
- Animals with access to the outdoors should be treated for fleas during late spring and early fall, as these are the high-risk seasons for contracting this type of parasite.
- Puppies living in areas where heartworm disease is common, or transiting through known high-risk areas, should receive monthly heartworm preventative treatments by the age of two months at the latest. In Quebec, this treatment is not recommended for cats as the disease is very rare in felines in this province. If you live elsewhere in Canada, check with your veterinarian to determine what the risk is.
- Fecal examinations should be conducted twice in the first year of your pet's life. Your veterinarian can use the information gathered from these examinations to deduce what medication is right for your pet as well as the frequency of treatment if parasites are discovered. From then on, examinations should be done annually.
- Nursing dogs should be treated along with their offspring, as they can often contract parasites from their young.

Always ensure that your pet is up-to-date on their vaccinations and that veterinary check-ups are regularly scheduled. Prevention truly is the first step to keeping your pets healthy. It is important to note that **certain contracted parasites can also impact you and your children**. Because of this, it is vital, for your health and safety as well, that your pet be treated.

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It is likely that you could contract a parasite from your pet. Roundworms, fleas and ticks are just a few parasites that humans can contract and grow ill from. For example, fleas can host tapeworms which can then affect both pets and humans. A tapeworm can easily nestle into the intestines and can be quite uncomfortable and painful if left untreated.

## Types of parasites

There is a surprisingly vast variety of parasites that pets can contract, some which can spread to humans. Below, I'll cover some of the most common parasites that affect dogs and cats. But keep in mind that there are other types of parasites, which is why it is so vital to schedule regular veterinary check-ups.

### Roundworms

Roundworms can be ingested by dogs or cats simply by licking the floor or soil. Pets may also get infected if they happen to catch/consume rodents or other small mammals infected with the larvae. It is important to know that both children and adults can also contract roundworms that can cause a variety of serious issues, including blindness. The most common symptoms are a round "pot belly", diarrhea, vomiting and respiratory issues. Roundworms can also lead to coughing and pneumonia.

### Hookworms

Hookworms and roundworms are very similar as they both live within the pets digestive system. They can also

be contracted easily if your pet happens to accidentally lick up the larvae. As with roundworms, humans can also be infected. Hookworms cause internal blood loss by feeding off of both tissue and blood from within the host. Noticeable symptoms include weight loss, bloody stool (diarrhea) and anemia.

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### **Heartworms**

Heartworms are typically contracted through mosquito bites and live in both the heart and lungs of the infected creature. While cats can be infected, the disease is very uncommon in felines in Quebec. The most obvious signs of heartworm infection are shortness of breath, coughing, tiring easily and fatigue. If left untreated, this disease can be fatal as it progressively causes heart failure.

### **Fleas**

Everyone knows about fleas. They are an extremely common and rather stubborn parasite that can impact a variety of furry animals. To eliminate fleas, it is vital to regularly treat your pet and its environment. If your home is infested, it is best to use a spray to control the fleas. However, ask your veterinarian first to ensure that your pet will be safe during the process. Fleas cause itching and scratching but can also have more severe implications if dogs develop a flea allergy, commonly known as Flea Allergy Dermatitis. Fleas can also cause puppies or kitten to become anemic and can carry Tapeworms.



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## Ticks

Ticks are also extremely common and regularly affect dogs, cats and humans. There are a variety of different Ticks, an especially important fact if you travel with your pet. If you do, make sure you talk to your veterinarian or conduct research about the risk of getting ticks during your journey. Ticks are contracted most commonly by your pet brushing against vegetation. They can easily latch themselves onto your pet and can be very difficult to remove.

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Ticks can cause painful abscesses, skin irritation and anemia. However, their biggest threat is that they can carry a vast variety of diseases such as:

*Babesiosis*, a disease that causes anemia and can result in death if left untreated.

*Borreliosis*, a disease that causes lethargy, fever, loss of appetite and even arthritis. It is commonly known as **Lyme Disease** and can be fatal.

*Ehrlichiosis*, a disease that initially causes a fever from which the animal may completely recover. If not, the untreated disease can progress, causing problems with the immune system, blood clots or issues with blood clotting, and can be fatal.

For more information on various types of parasites, ask your veterinarian about what kinds your pet may be susceptible to contract. Remember that with regular check-ups, up-to-date vaccinations and treatments, the threat of these parasites lowers drastically. Prevention remains the best measure of protection.

## An additional measure

Since we are talking about medication, treatments and keeping our pets safe, there is one other vital measure for you to take to ensure that your pet's health remains at its peak and you don't have to make an emergency visit to the veterinarian.

It is extremely important that you keep all medication – even that which is prescribed to your pets – far out of their reach. **Never treat an animal with over the counter medication that is meant for humans.** Even if it seems harmless, even if it is meant for babies, medication meant for humans can be fatal to our pets. On this note, even their medicine can be fatal if consumed in large quantities.

If your pet is on any medication for parasites or any other illness, keep it locked away. Assume that if it is on the counter or on the table, they can access it. It is best to keep it up high, in your medicine cabinet, an inaccessible closet or even on the top shelf of your pantry.

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This also includes medical or recreational marijuana, as it can be fatal to animals in certain doses. Marijuana can also result in paranoia in pets, lethargy, low blood pressure, loss of balance and abnormal heart rhythms.



It is also especially important not to let puppies (or any dogs) pick up objects while you are walking them. Before you know it, your animal may accidentally consume marijuana or traces of it on another object. While it may be legal for humans, it is best kept far out of reach when it comes to cats and dogs.

So remember to schedule regular check-ups with your veterinarian, keep your pet's vaccinations up-to-date, inform yourself on the threat of parasites and if your pet is receiving treatments, keep the medicine locked away.

Have a happy, safe and parasite-free summer!

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**Vanessa Rose** is the founder and owner of [Les Anges Gardiennes](#) pet care which offers a variety of services "to keep your pets safe, comfortable and loved".



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