

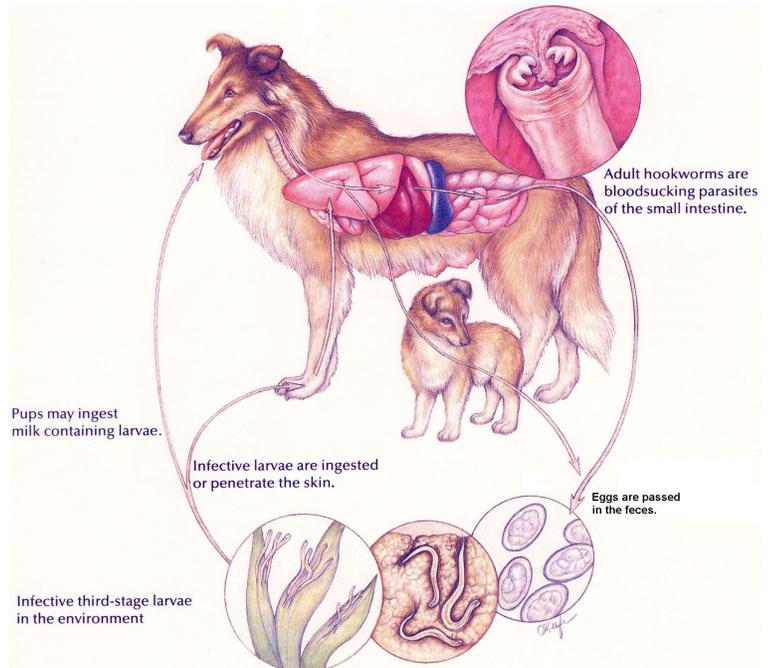
### WHAT ARE HOOKWORMS?

Hookworms are parasites, which get their name from the hook-like mouth parts they use to attach to the intestinal wall. They are only about 1/8" (3 mm) long and so small in diameter that you have to be looking very carefully to see them. Despite their small size, they suck large amounts of blood from the tiny vessels in the intestinal wall. A large number of hookworms can cause anemia.

#### *How did my pet get hookworms?*

Pets may become infected with hookworms by four routes: orally, through the skin, through the mother's placenta before birth, and through the mother's milk.

A pet may become infected when it swallows hookworm larvae (immature worm). The larvae may also penetrate the skin and migrate to the intestine to mature and complete its life cycle. If a pregnant animal has hookworms, the pregnancy may reactivate larvae. These larvae will enter the female's circulation and pass to the babies through the placental blood flow. Finally, nursing animals may become infected through the mother's milk. This is considered to be an important route of infection for puppies.



#### *What kinds of problems do hookworms cause for my pet?*

The most significant problems appear related to intestinal distress and anemia. Blood loss results from the parasites sucking blood from intestinal capillaries. The presence of pale gums, diarrhea, or weakness might suggest the need to specifically determine the pet's red blood cell count. Some times significant weight loss, bloody diarrhea, or failure to grow properly can occur with hookworm infection.

#### *How is hookworm infection diagnosed?*

Hookworms are diagnosed with a microscopic examination of a small stool sample. Since there are so many eggs produced on a daily basis, they are rather easily detected.

#### *How are the hookworms treated?*

There are several very effective drugs that will kill hookworms. These are given orally and have few, if any, side effects. However, these drugs only kill the adult hookworms. Therefore, it is necessary to treat again in about 2-4 weeks to kill any newly formed adult worms that were larvae at the time of the first treatment.

A blood transfusion may be necessary in some pets because of the rather severe anemia, which can be produced.

#### *Are hookworms infectious to people?*

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Adult hookworms do not infect humans; however, the larvae can burrow into human skin. This causes itching, commonly called ground itch, but the worms do not mature into adults. Direct contact of human skin to moist, hookworm infested soil is required. Fortunately, this does not occur very often if normal hygiene practices are observed.

### ***What can be done to control hookworm infection in pets and to prevent human infection?***

1. All puppies & kittens should be treated at 2-3 weeks of age.
2. Prompt deworming should be given when parasites are detected; periodic deworming may be appropriate for pets at high risk for reinfection.
3. Prompt disposal of pet's feces should occur, especially in yards, playgrounds, and public parks.
4. Strict hygiene is important, especially for children. Do not allow children to play in potentially contaminated environments.
5. Nursing females should be treated concurrently with their puppies/kittens; nursing may reactivate infection in the female.
6. Most heartworm prevention products contain a drug that will kill the adult hookworms, but in severe cases, 2-3 dose may be needed, usually given 2 weeks apart.