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PARASITES AND YOUR DOG

Below you will find information about the most common parasites affecting pet dogs in the UK.

As a minimum, we advise all dogs are treated routinely for fleas and that all adult dogs are wormed against roundworms every 3 months.

The choice of product depends on a number of factors:

- Pet lifestyle – e.g. some products are less effective if your dog regularly swims.
- Other parasite protection required – unfortunately no one product will treat all parasites. Therefore our vets will determine which is the best product combination for your pet depending on which parasites they are most at risk of.
- Pet personality and owner preference – some dogs prefer a tasty dog chew, rather than a spot-on, or vice versa.

At Greenbay Vets we tailor parasite protection to suit you and your pet. We recommend prescription vet-only products because they are tested to a high level to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety.

FLEAS

Fleas are insects which have a 4 stage life-cycle: eggs, larvae, pupae and adult fleas. Only adult fleas live on the pet – the rest live in your home and garden environment. Female fleas can produce over 2000 eggs in their life-time, so live fleas seen are only the tip of the iceberg. The whole life-cycle can take a few weeks through to 6 months; the pupae are very resilient and can lie dormant until the right conditions for hatching.

Adult fleas suck the blood of the pet and produce faeces which look like tiny black dots in the pet's fur. Flea bites can cause anything from mild irritation through to a severe allergy in your dog. Fleas also transmit a type of tapeworm (*Dipylidium caninum*).

Treatment for a flea infestation can be an expensive, time-consuming and frustrating process. Effective prevention is much simpler than curing an infestation. For effective flea prevention you should treat all your dogs and cats all year round, even if they don't mix with other animals. Any breaks/lapse in treatment will mean your pet is at risk of picking up fleas again. Once on your pet they will start rapidly breeding and laying eggs which will infest your home.

Prescription products bought from the vets help to prevent an infestation by effectively and quickly killing adult fleas. They also prevent any eggs that are laid from hatching out and/or kill the flea before they have a chance to lay any eggs. Different products are available to suit your dog and their lifestyle e.g. tasty chews, spot-on preparations and long-lasting collars.

MITES

Cheyletiella

This is more common in rabbits, but can occasionally be seen in young dogs. The main sign is excessive dandruff and itching. The vet can diagnose it by looking for the mite in a sample of skin or hair under the microscope.

Demodex

This mite lives in the dog's hair follicles and is transmitted from mother to young while the puppies are suckling. Most dogs never develop any symptoms, but some dogs develop skin problems a few months later. Symptoms can also occur in older dogs if they have a problem with their immune system.

Signs include small patches of hair loss in mild cases, usually with no itching. In severe cases pustules and secondary infection with bacteria can complicate matters. The vet can diagnose Demodex by taking a scraping of skin and looking at it under the microscope. Treatment can be prolonged depending on the individual dog.

Sarcoptes (fox mange)

This is a very contagious disease with most severe signs seen in young or debilitated dogs. Symptoms include intense itchiness and redness of the skin, mainly on the ears and head. It can be difficult to diagnose, and may require multiple scrapings of skin and blood tests. Treatment is usually effective once the diagnosis has been made and may consist of medicated baths or spot-on preparations.

Otodectes (ear mites)

Ear mites are quite common, especially in puppies, and can be transmitted from mother to young, or from contact with cats. They may cause ear irritation e.g. head shaking, scratching at the ear. The vet can usually diagnose and treat this quite easily.

TICKS

Ticks jump onto dogs (as well as other animals and humans), and become engorged as they take a blood meal. They are most active in spring and autumn, but can remain active all summer in cool damp areas.

Dogs do not generally notice the tick feeding, but they can be irritating. The main concern with tick's feeding is transmission of disease. In the UK the main disease of concern is **Lyme disease**. Effective tick prevention is essential if your dog is travelling abroad where there are even more serious diseases spread by ticks.

There are prescription products available from the vets to help prevent problems from ticks. Most products kill ticks after they have attached and started to feed; they then die and drop off while small and hopefully before any transmission of disease. Some products also repel ticks, but none are 100% effective.

If you find a tick on your dog, it is best to remove it, and we can do this for you. It is very important that the head is removed, as if the body is pulled off and the head left in it can cause problems. Tick hooks are available from us which can be used to safely 'twist' the tick out.

WORMS

Tapeworms

The most common tapeworm in dogs is spread by fleas. Little white segments may be seen around the dog's bottom. Control is with worming treatment and dealing with the fleas.

Other dog tapeworms are spread between sheep or rabbits, and dogs. Dogs mainly become infected by scavenging. One of these tapeworms can also cause disease in humans. The risk depends on where the dog lives and their lifestyle, but generally routine tape worm treatment is advisable to protect sheep, dog and human health. Tapeworm control is essential for dog's travelling abroad.

Prescription worming tablets from the vets will effectively treat all tapeworms.

Roundworms

Roundworms live in the dog's bowels and look how you would expect a worm to look. Dogs can become infected from hunting small mammals, but mostly they are infected as puppies from their mother via the placenta and milk. The roundworm of most concern is *Toxocara Canis* - this is because if humans eat the worm eggs (young children are most at risk) it can cause serious problems including blindness.

To control the risk of roundworms in humans it is advised to worm all dogs every 3 months and to pick up dog faeces. Puppies need to be treated more regularly - we advise worming every 2 weeks until 12 weeks old, then monthly until 6 months old. Bitches that are having puppies need more frequent treatment as well. Dogs that live with small children can be wormed monthly to ensure minimal risk to the children, but good hygiene is still advisable.

Prescription worming tablets from the vets will effectively treat all roundworms. There are also prescription spot-on flea treatments that cover roundworms as well.

Lungworm (*Angiostrongylus vasorum*)

Lungworm is becoming increasingly important. It can cause coughing and tiredness, but also more serious problems such as bleeding, collapse and neurological disease. Dogs become infected by eating slugs or snails. It is diagnosed using a combination of x-rays, blood tests and samples of airway fluid and/or faeces.

If lungworm is a concern due to the lifestyle of your dog, it can be prevented by monthly use of certain prescription spot-on or tablet products.