

## **Intestinal Parasites**

To ensure the health and well being of pets and their owners (as many parasites can be harmful to human beings), fecal examinations for parasite eggs, oocysts and cysts are an important part of the yearly check up at Marlborough Veterinary Clinic.

### **Roundworms**

While occasionally seen as spaghetti-like worms in the stool, infections usually remain invisible to the naked eye. Dogs and cats are both affected by roundworms. Transmission can be via direct contact with fecal matter, consumption of prey items, nursing an infected mother (milk) or as a prenatal infection through the placenta.

\*Human infection is possible

### **Hookworms**

Primarily a canine parasite in our area, these worms are too small to be seen with the naked eye. Transmission can be prenatal, milk-borne, through intermediate hosts, fecal-oral contact and via skin penetration.

\*Human infection is possible

### **Whipworms**

Again, primarily a canine parasite, these worms are rarely seen as adults. Transmission via contact with infected stool (or infected environments), and while capable of causing severe gastrointestinal disease in dogs, rarely pose a problem for humans. Eggs in the environment are extremely difficult to eradicate. For this reason, it is sometimes wise to use a product that prevents infection in households where a diagnosis has previously been made.

### **Tapeworms**

Affecting both dogs and cats, this parasite is visible to the naked eye and appears as a flat glistening white rice grain sized object on the surface of fresh stool. Occasionally dried segments are seen on the hairs around the anus. These “rice grains” are actually segments of the intact tapeworm residing higher in the gut. Tapeworms are acquired through an intermediate host – most commonly a flea ingested during self-grooming. Flea prevention therefore is crucial to successfully controlling this parasite after existing adults have been eliminated.

\*Human infection is possible

### **Protozoans**

Coccidia and Giardia are common parasites of dogs and cats. They are often acquired during exposure to contaminated water (or other environmental) sources. One species common to cats (Toxoplasma) is a severe health threat to the human fetus (pregnant women should avoid handling litter boxes or other areas where cat fecal contamination is likely).

\*Human infection is possible

### **Exotic Pets**

Reptiles, birds and other exotics harbor their own varieties of the aforementioned parasites, as well as many others. Yearly fecal examinations are strongly encouraged.