



TOXOCARA

What is Toxocara?

Toxocara is the name given to certain species of roundworms commonly found in dogs and cats. Virtually all puppies are born with Toxocara; they, and kittens, can also be infected with Toxocara through their mother's milk or from the environment contamination.

Toxocara canis, the dog round worm, can endanger human health. *Toxocara cati*, the cat worm, has also been associated with cases of toxocariasis (Toxocara infection).

How is Toxocara spread?

Microscopic Toxocara eggs are present in the faeces of infected animals. These eggs have thick and sticky shells which means that they can remain infective in the soil for two to four years after the faeces have disappeared. The sticky shell helps eggs to adhere to fingers or clothing.

Importantly, eggs will only become infective after a minimum period of two weeks in ideal conditions after being passed in the faeces.

How do you pick up Toxocara?

Quite simply, by accidentally swallowing the infective Toxocara eggs picked up from the ground.

This is why crawling babies and toddlers are most at risk: they tend to put dirty fingers and toys into their mouths. Medical records show that approximately 100 new cases of toxocariasis are diagnosed each year.

What can happen?

Once swallowed, Toxocara eggs release larvae into the intestine. These larvae travel through the body until they die, which may take several years.

What can you do?

The first thing is to worm the cat or dog using a reliable, proven wormer. This will help to keep the animal in good condition.

The second is to practice the following preventive techniques, so that your children and Toxocara stay well apart.

1. Ensure that children always wash their hands before eating.
2. Encourage them to avoid sucking dirty fingers.
3. Don't allow children to play on the ground and eat using their fingers at the same time.
4. Be sure that floors where children play are clean.
5. Don't put small children on the entrance floors of public buildings.
6. Don't leave young children unsupervised with a pet.
7. Always clear up pet faeces immediately, especially in public places.
8. Train cats to use a litter tray.
9. Fence round play areas to exclude dogs.
10. Cover sandpits to keep out cats.
11. Be careful that your dog doesn't foul public play areas.
12. If it does, clear up using tissues, a nappy sack or scoop, and deposit in a suitable bin. Remember to wash your hands afterwards.