

# Worming your cat

## Worms - the parasite problem inside your pet...

### What are roundworms and tapeworms?

These are two of the most common intestinal parasites of cats and kittens. Roundworms are white, long worms which may resemble 'spaghetti'. They can be seen in infected cats'/kittens' faeces or may be vomited.

Tapeworms are long, flat worms composed of many segments. The tapeworm releases mature segments that contain eggs from the end of the worm into faeces. These segments look like white, flattened grains of rice and are mobile. They are commonly seen in the hair around the bottoms of infected cats.

### How does my kitten get roundworms?

Roundworms are very common, particularly in young cats and kittens. The common species are *Toxocara cati* and *Toxocara leonina*.

*Toxocara cati* has a very important route of transmission to kittens - through the mother cat's milk. From earlier infections with roundworm the queen (mother cat) will have some larvae remaining dormant in certain tissues in the body and when she gives birth to a litter, these larvae migrate to the mammary glands and are excreted in the milk. The process causes no harm to the queen but does mean that kittens are commonly infected with roundworms from a very young age. Roundworm infections are extremely common and it is safe to assume that all kittens are infected. Both *Toxocara cati* and *Toxocara leonina* are passed as worms or eggs in cats' faeces. The worm eggs can lie in the soil for some time, being picked up by another cat usually by sticking to fur then being ingested. In addition, the worm eggs may be eaten by another mammal such as a small rodent and a cat can be infected by preying on that rodent.

### How does my kitten get tapeworm?

There are a variety of different tapeworms that infect cats, but the two most common are *Dipylidium caninum* and *Taenia taeniaeformis*. The eggs of *Dipylidium*, shed within the tapeworm segments in faeces, are eaten by flea larvae. As your cat grooms himself, he ingests the flea thus infecting himself with tapeworms. As flea infections are so common in cats, this

tapeworm is also common and it should be assumed that any cat with fleas will also have *Dipylidium tapeworms*. In contrast, the eggs of *Taenia taeniaeformis* are eaten by rodents so other cats become infected during hunting by eating an infected rodent. If your kitten becomes a hunter, it is important he/she is wormed regularly for tapeworms.

### Can these worms infect humans?

Yes, it is possible for a human to become infected with both *Toxocara cati* and *Dipylidium caninum*. The latter is very rare as it does involve the ingestion of an infected flea. *Toxocara cati* however is more of a concern, particularly in children. Ingestion of a *Toxocara* egg can result in migration of the worm larvae through the body causing potential damage. This is much more of a risk with the dog roundworm (*Toxocara canis*). Due to the potential health hazard, as well as the possible ill-health to your kitten, regular worming is so important. In addition, careful disposal of litter from your kitten's litter tray is important and ideally the tray should be washed daily with boiled water. Ensure your child's sandpit is covered when not in use. They make perfect litter trays for cats!

