

The most common intestinal worms that cats get are called roundworms and tapeworms. Many infected cats do not show signs of having worms; however, heavy burdens of worms can cause weight loss, vomiting and diarrhoea, irritation around the anus and failure to thrive. These worms rarely infect people, however when infection occurs there can be serious health implications (eg, roundworms), so it is important to control infection in our cats. Hookworms are not commonly seen in the UK, however with the increased number of cats travelling under the Pet Travel Scheme, this may change.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms are long flat worms composed of many segments. Segments containing worm eggs are passed in the faeces. These segments resemble grains of rice in appearance and can sometimes be seen on the hair around the anus of the cat, in the faeces and on the cat's bed.

The most common types of tapeworm that infect cats are called *Dipylidium caninum* and *Taenia taeniaeformis*. *Dipylidium* is transmitted to cats by fleas. Immature fleas (larvae) ingest the eggs of the worm and infection is passed on to a cat when it swallows an infected flea during grooming. It should therefore be assumed that any cat infected with fleas also has *Dipylidium*, and vice versa.

The other type of tapeworm, *Taenia taeniaeformis*, is passed on to cats by small rodents (rats and mice). Worm eggs are eaten by rodents and passed on to cats when they hunt and eat an infected rodent. This infection therefore occurs in any cats that hunt.

Roundworms

Roundworms are the most common intestinal parasites in cats. There are two different types, *Toxocara cati* and *Toxascaris leonina*. Eggs from these worms are passed in the faeces and can be eaten (ingested) by other cats. Eggs can remain infective within the environment for months to years! Infection can also be passed by rodents (an intermediate host) that have eaten eggs and in turn are eaten by a cat.

Toxocara cati is also passed through the milk of the queen (mother) to her kittens. Whenever a queen is infected with roundworm some immature forms of the roundworm (larvae) remain dormant in certain tissues in the body. This causes no harm to the queen but when she gives birth the larvae migrate to the mammary glands and are excreted in the milk. This is a very common route of infection and we can therefore assume that most kittens will be infected with *Toxocara cati*. It is estimated that 10% of adult cats also shed this worm in their faeces. *T leonina* is not often seen in the UK.

When to worm your cat

As roundworms are very prevalent in kittens it is important to worm them very frequently when they are young. The recommendations are to treat every two weeks from about six weeks of age to 16 weeks of age, with a drug active against roundworms.

Tapeworms are only usually a problem in older cats, so adult cats need to be treated with a drug active against both roundworms and tapeworms. The precise frequency of treatment recommended will vary slightly depending on for example whether the cat hunts and whether or not it is treated regularly for fleas (fleas can become infected when taking blood from the cat). Treatment is recommended every 2-3 months in adult cats, with a drug active against roundworms and tapeworms, possibly extending to 6 months for an indoor cat.

Which worming products to use

There are many different worming products available on the market, which can be obtained from supermarkets and pet shops as well as veterinary surgeries. Many of these, however, are not very effective and therefore it is important to obtain the advice of your veterinary surgeon before deciding which one to use.

Some worming medications are effective against both roundworm and tapeworm, while others are only effective against one or the other. It is therefore important that an appropriate product is chosen for the requirements of your cat.

Traditionally, worming preparations came in a tablet form. We have all experienced difficulties in administering tablets to cats. A number of pharmaceutical companies have recently won FAB Easy to Give Awards for developing wormers that

are smaller or more palatable for cats (eg, Milbemax; Novartis). It is often helpful to syringe 2-3 ml of water into the mouth afterwards to encourage swallowing. 'Pill poppers' are devices to help administer tablets, however care must be taken when using these as they can damage the mouth and throat if used wrongly or roughly.

Panacur (Intervet Schering-Plough) is specially made to be particularly palatable for cats and may be very useful in cats that are difficult to medicate. A very small roundworm and tapeworm worming tablet has also been launched by Novartis. Liquid 'spot-on' formulations for application to the skin (such as Profender; Bayer) are also easily applied.

Many other formulations of worming medications are now available such as liquids, pastes and granules (Panacur; Intervet Schering-Plough), injections (Droncit; Bayer) and spot-ons (Droncit; Bayer, Profender; Bayer, Stronghold; Pfizer) All of these medications are available through your veterinary surgeon who will be able to advise you further on the most appropriate treatment for your cat.

People and worms

Roundworms can infect humans, not usually in the adult form, but in their larval form. In a few cases children who ingest the eggs can suffer eye damage or blindness because the worm larvae move through the body causing damage to the tissues. Tapeworm infection of humans is not common but can occur occasionally, usually in children who have ingested a flea which contains the larvae of the tapeworm. Worming your cat regularly and keeping it treated against fleas will ensure the risk is absolutely minimal.

Most commonly used worming medications, all of which are very effective

- **Panacur (Intervet)**
Contains fenbendazole. Active against gastrointestinal roundworms, lungworms and Taenia tapeworms. Licensed for use in kittens from 2 weeks of age and for use in pregnant queens. It is available in the form of granules, liquid, paste and a newly formed palatable tablet.
 - **Drontal cat (Bayer)**
Contains pyrantel (active against roundworm) and praziquantel (active against tapeworm), in a tablet form.
 - **Droncit injection (Bayer)**
Contains praziquantel. Active against tapeworm only.
 - **Droncit spot-on (Bayer)**
Contains praziquantel. Active against tapeworm only.
 - **Stronghold spot-on (Pfizer)**
Contains selamectin. Active against roundworm only. Also active against ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*), mange (*Sarcoptes scabiei*) and fleas.
- **Milbemax for cats and Milbemax for small cats and kittens (Novartis)**
Contains milbemycin oxime (effective against roundworms) and praziquantel (effective against tapeworms). Very small and palatable tablets which make them easier to dose cats with.
 - **Profender spot-on (Bayer)**
Active against tapeworm, roundworm and hookworms.

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