

Wellness Care

The Importance of Parasite Testing

Every year, your reminder about your pet's annual physical examination comes with a note: "Please bring stool sample." It's not a pleasant part of bringing your pet in, but it is a necessary one. Even if your pet stays indoors, he or she should be tested annually for common parasites, some of which can be detected by analyzing your pet's stool.

What We're Looking For

Intestinal parasites are the main targets of fecal analysis for parasite testing. These parasites include many kinds of worms, such as tapeworms, hookworms, roundworms, and whipworms. Worms large enough to be seen with the naked eye can live in your pet's intestines and are not often found in the stool; however, we can detect their eggs in the stool using



Many common parasites and their eggs can be seen under the microscope.

a microscope. Other parasites that may be found by fecal analysis include microscopic organisms.

How Can My Indoor Pet Get Parasites?

Even if your pet never goes outside, regular parasite testing is important. Parasites are common in wildlife, and people and other animals that do go in and out of the home can bring in microscopic parasites and eggs from the outdoors. Animals can become infected when they groom themselves or eat something off the floor when you're not looking. Nursing puppies and kittens that have never gone outside can also get parasites from their mother; in fact, this is very common. Puppies and kittens usually require deworming at their initial veterinary visits.

What We Need

The sample you bring for testing should be fresh—preferably from the same day. This is important because the tests do not work with dry material. The good news is that we don't need much. A piece about the size of a whole walnut is big enough. Please bring it in a clean, leakproof plastic baggie or disposable container.

What We Do

There are a variety of ways we check your pet's stool for evidence of parasites. One, called a *direct smear*, involves examining a tiny piece of the sample under a microscope. Another, known as *fecal flotation*, requires mixing a small piece of the sample with a special solution and using a machine called a *centrifuge* to help separate any parasite eggs, which can also be seen under the microscope.

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Some parasites and eggs do not show up on all tests because there are too few of them in the sample or because the testing process damages them. If we think that your pet may have one of these parasites, we may ask for another sample so we can either send it to a laboratory or conduct further tests ourselves.

Why We Do It

When you see that note on your annual reminder, you may think, "I did that last year, and my pet was fine. He's still healthy...do I really need to bring in another sample this year?" The answer is yes! Often, parasites do not cause signs of illness in pets. However, many kinds of parasites can infect dogs and cats, and some can even infect people. Also, even if you haven't introduced any new pets into your household, you may unknowingly bring parasites or their eggs inside (on your clothes or shoes), where they may be transmitted to your pets.

Year-round parasite preventives are effective, and we recommend them. However, if

your pet becomes infected and begins to have gastrointestinal problems (e.g., diarrhea), multiple treatments may be necessary to get rid of the parasites. You may also have to take special steps to clean your home to prevent reinfection, and other pets may be affected and need treatment. Remember, although it's not common, many of the internal parasites

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we see in dogs and cats can affect people, too. This is another reason why parasite prevention and control are such important parts of your pet's overall health.

Regular testing can help ensure that your pet is as healthy as he or she looks!

For more information on preventing parasites in your pet, visit
www.petsandparasites.org.