



# The Scoop on Poop

## Understanding Intestinal Parasites & Fecal Flotation

**Intestinal parasites** are of great concern for your cat or dog and your family. Consider these statistics;

- Nationwide, 34% of dogs are infected with gastrointestinal parasites.
- Roundworms and hookworms are present in *almost all areas* of the United States.
- Many different parasite eggs can thrive in the environment for years.
- 3-6 million people each year in the United States are infected by roundworms. **The majority of these are children.** Typically children become infected by putting soil/sand/objects that are contaminated with fecal matter into their mouths. They can damage their eyes or skin.
- Hookworm larvae can penetrate human skin.
- Toxoplasmosis, whose infective carrier is the cat, is of great concern to pregnant and immunocompromised people.
- Tapeworms cannot be transmitted from your pet directly to you. However, you can be infected by ingesting a flea, the carrier of the infective stage. Many cats and dogs are infested by fleas.



### Why should you test your pet's stool?

There are several intestinal parasites, such as hookworms and roundworms that are zoonotic. Zoonotic diseases are contagious diseases that spread between animals and humans. People can get zoonotic diseases from contact with infected live poultry, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and other domestic and wild animals in places such as: *Animal displays, petting zoos, pet stores, nature parks, wooded and bushy areas, farms, county or state fairs or in your own backyard!*

### Who can get zoonotic diseases?

Anyone who has contact with animals can get a zoonotic disease, but people with a weakened immune system, children age 5, the elderly, and pregnant women are at a higher risk.



Blindness Caused by Roundworms



Human Hookworm Infection



Human Roundworm Infection

### How can I test my pet?

Fecal flotation is a routine test that is used to identify the presence of intestinal parasites or "worms". The test actually detects the eggs of mature parasites that live in the intestine and excrete their eggs to the outside in the host's stool. Fecal floats can detect eggs from parasites such as roundworms and hookworms, or from protozoa such as Giardia and Toxoplasmosis.

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## How does the test work?

Stool material is mixed with a special solution that causes the parasite eggs to float to the surface. The eggs are collected from the surface of the liquid onto a glass slide, which is then examined under the microscope. If eggs are found, the type of parasite can be identified by the appearance of the eggs, while the number of eggs present can often estimate the severity of the infection.

800 px Hookworm Egg



## My pet's fecal came back negative, but we know the pet has worms.

Sometimes the worms in the intestine are too young to produce eggs. If eggs are not present in the stool, then the infection will not be detected. This is most likely to happen in young pets, and is one of the reasons for doing multiple tests in puppies and kittens.

In other situations, if the infection is mild and there are only a few mature parasites in the intestine, then the number of eggs in the stool sample may be too low to be detected. In these pets, the fecal flotation may be negative even though parasites are present. Some of the intestinal parasites produce small numbers of eggs on an infrequent basis.

If the fecal flotation is negative and the veterinarian still suspects there is a problem with parasites, repeat fecal flotation may be recommended.

## How else can I protect my pet and my family?

-Have fecal exams done on your pet's feces 1-2 times a year. Have fecal exams done 2-4 times if your pet is under one year of age.

-Practice good hygiene. Wash hands frequently, especially after handling pets or cleaning up pet waste. Make sure hands are washed before eating.

-Wear shoes in areas where there are apt to be animal stools such as parks and playgrounds. Wear gloves while gardening.

-Keep pets flea-free. Use appropriate flea/tick preventatives.

-Clean litter boxes daily. Have someone else besides pregnant or immunocompromised people perform this task.

-Administer heartworm products that also have activity against roundworms and hookworms year-round.

## Where can I go to find out more information on intestinal parasites and parasite prevention?

Visit our Hawthorne Animal Hospital Client Education page at: [www.glencarbonhawthorne.com](http://www.glencarbonhawthorne.com)

*Information in this brochure gathered in part from CAPC, AAHA, and the CDC.*

