

Parasites at a glance

Parasites can cause a variety of health problems for your pet—and even death. One of the biggest concerns is the potential for them to spread to humans. This handout lists common parasites in cats and dogs, the signs, detection, and whether they can spread to humans—these are known as zoonotic parasites.

Veterinarians divide parasites into two main categories—external (ectoparasites) and internal (endoparasites). Fleas, ticks, and mites are ectoparasites. Endoparasites, such as heartworms or tapeworms are often harder to detect but typically cause more severe disease. Here's a look at both:

| | Signs and complications | Zoonotic | Detection |
|---|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Ectoparasites | | | |
| Fleas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Mild to severe itching, scratching, biting, and chewing > Flea saliva hypersensitivity or allergy and resulting skin problems > The transmission of tapeworms > Anemia and possible death in young or small animals | No | Examination of the animal for adult fleas, flea dirt, or small black specks of dried flea feces. A blood test can detect a flea allergy. |
| Ticks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Mild local irritation to severe anemia > Transmission of other diseases to animals and humans—Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and <i>Ehrlichia</i>, among others | Yes | Examination of the animal |
| Mites and lice The three main types: sarcoptic mange, demodectic mange, and <i>Cheyletiella</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Itching, hair loss, dandruff or crusty lesions, and bleeding or oozing skin | Some mites: Yes Lice: No | Examination of the animal and skin scrapings |
| Endoparasites | | | |
| Heartworms Transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > May not exhibit signs until late in the course of the disease > Coughing, difficulty breathing, panting, exercise intolerance, decreased activity level, and sudden death | No | Blood test |
| Roundworms and hookworms Live in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract; transmitted through fecal-oral contact and from mother to offspring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Diarrhea, anemia, and loss of body condition | Yes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Fecal examination > Observation of worms |
| Tapeworms Live in the GI tract; transmitted from ingestion of fleas, rodents, and rabbits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > None to diarrhea, weight loss, and poor body condition | Yes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Observation of tapeworm segments in freshly passed feces > Fecal examination |

Parasite treatments

Our practice offers both preventive and curative treatments for parasites. Of course, we prefer to prevent parasites, to save your pet the discomfort of parasite infestation and minimize your family's risk. Speak with your veterinarian to learn which products are right for your pet.