

# TAPEWORM INFESTATIONS



## Facts About Tapeworms

- Tapeworms require **intermediate hosts** to complete their life cycle. The intermediate host is usually a rodent.
- Tapeworms cannot be transmitted by direct contact or by contact with feces containing eggs. The only means of acquiring a tapeworm infection is to ingest uncooked meat containing larval cysts.
- Clinical signs usually account to little more than diarrhea, though large worm loads can cause vomiting.

Tapeworms are the most frequent intestinal nematode we see in adult dogs in cats. While they are unpleasant to think about and should be treated, they rarely cause serious health problems beyond diarrhea. This handout discusses the life cycle of the tapeworm and its significance in pet care.

## The Tapeworm Life Cycle

It is essential to recognize the important fact that all tapeworms require an intermediate host to complete their life cycle. This is the primary reason why it is usually an

infection of adult animals.

The tapeworm life cycle begins as eggs that are defecated by affected predatory animals, such as your dog or cat, or a predatory wild animal like a coyote. When your pet defecates, the eggs are spread in vegetation in the grass.

These eggs are then accidentally ingested by an intermediate host, often times a rodent such as a rabbit or mouse. Once the eggs are ingested, they hatch into larvae and migrate into the intermediate host's muscle tissue, where they encyst. Encysted larvae can live for years in the muscle of these prey animals.

To complete the life cycle, the predator then catches the intermediate host and eats the raw meat. This activates the cysts, which then hatch into adult worms which live in the predator's gastrointestinal tract. This completes the life cycle.

## How Serious is An Infection?

Most of the time, tapeworms merely cause diarrhea, as well as some nausea on the owners' part! Often times, segments of the worm which contain the eggs are passed in the stool. These

segments usually look like rice and may even be still wriggling.

On rare occasions, a high wormload can cause a partial obstruction, resulting in some vomiting.

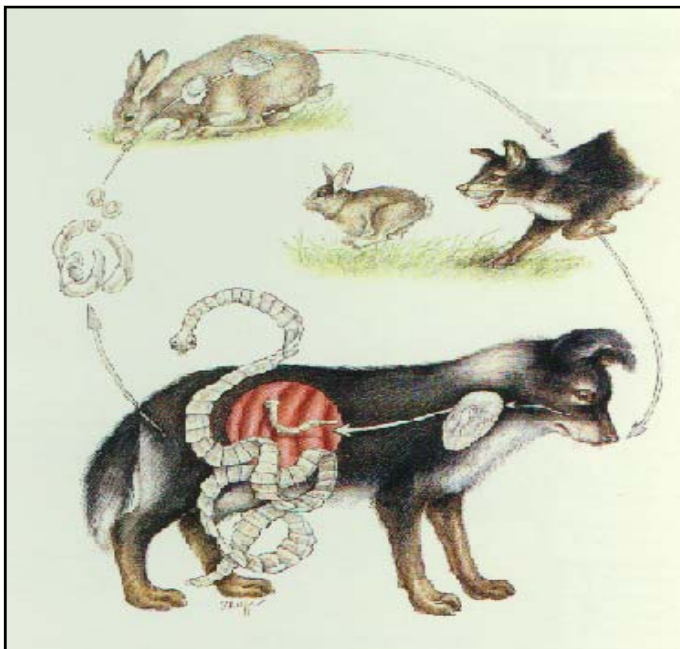
## Is it Possible for Me or My Family to Get Infected?

This can only happen if you or your family eat infected, uncooked meat. It is impossible for your pet to transmit tapeworms directly to you or your family.

However, often times an animal may have more than one kind of intestinal parasite. Other intestinal worms, such as roundworms, can be transmitted to humans through a pet's feces. Therefore, you should always practice good hygiene with your pets and keep your yard and litter boxes clean, even if your pet cannot transmit tapeworms.

## How are they Treated?

A one-time dose of prescription dewormer, available from your veterinarian, can rid your pet of the worms. Preventing your pet from consuming animals such as mice or rabbits will eliminate the source of the infection.



**THE TAPEWORM LIFE CYCLE:** The predator devours an intermediate host that is infected with larval cysts. Once inside the predator's GI tract, the cysts break open and become adult worms, producing eggs which are passed in the stool. The prey then eats vegetation contaminated with eggs, at which time the eggs hatch open into larvae. These larvae migrate to muscle tissue and encyst.