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Wipworms

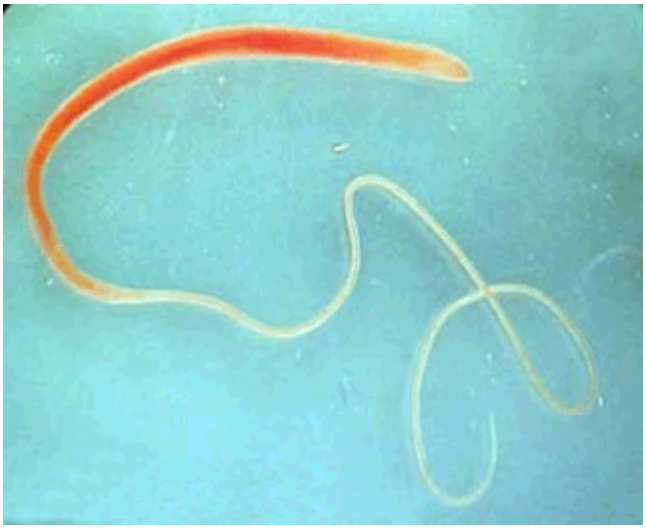
Burrow into the lining of the large intestine and feed off the host's blood.

(Trichuris Vulpis and relatives)

Introduction and summery.

Whipworms got their name from their whip-like shape.

Dogs can become infected with whipworms by ingesting infected food or water.
Mature whipworms burrow into the lining of the large intestine and *feed off the host's blood*. In mild infections, no symptoms arise, but in severe infections, the intestinal wall may become inflamed resulting in anemia, weight loss and diarrhoea.

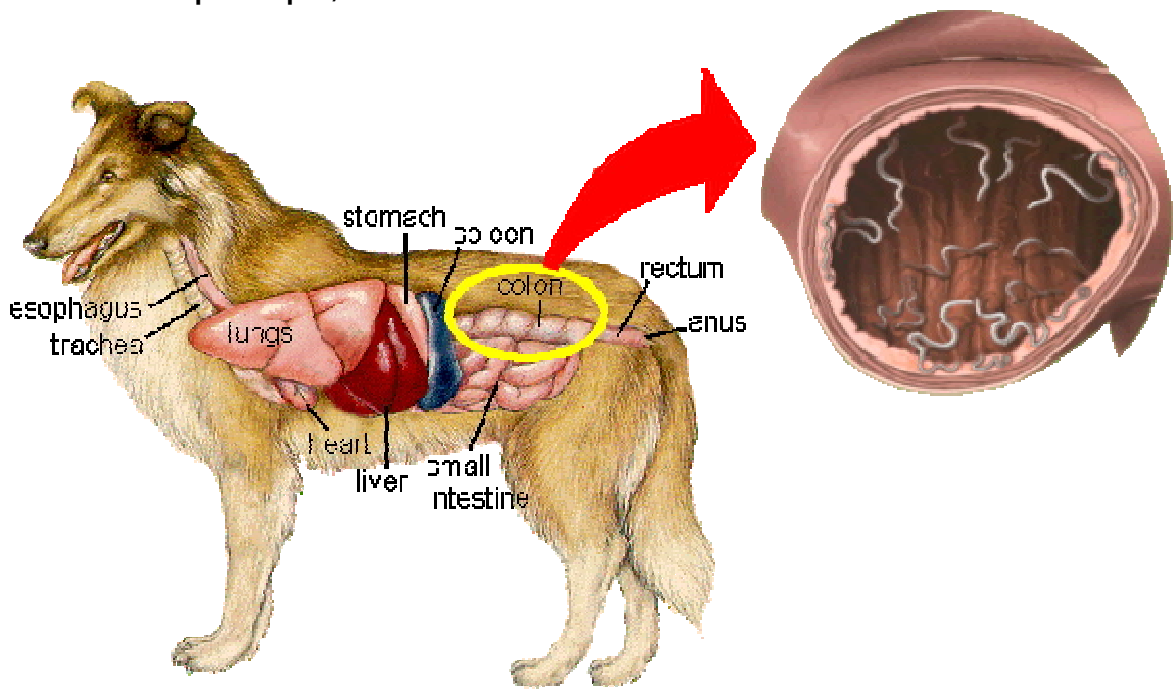


Adult Whipworm

This worm is one of the "big four" intestinal parasites with which our dogs must contend: roundworms, tapeworms, hookworms, and **whipworms**.

The whipworm of the dog (*Trichuris vulpis*) is substantially smaller than the other worms (a mere 30-50 mm in length,) and is rarely seen as it lives in the cecum (the part of the large intestine where the small and large intestine meet).

The "head" (or more accurately the digestive end of the worm) is skinny versus its stout tail (or reproductive end) which gives the worm a whip shape, hence the name.

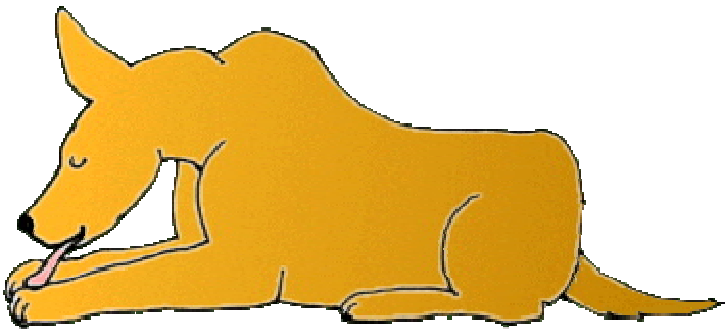


In the dogs digestive tract, food passes from mouth to oesophagus to stomach to small intestine to large intestine to rectum and then to the outside world.
This means the large intestine is one of the last stops for nutrients and by this point in the journey, nutrients have largely been broken down and absorbed.
The large intestine (also called the “colon”) serves to absorb water, to store faecal material, and to provide a home for a spectacular number of bacteria which are able to digest the leftover food.
The large intestine is the home of the whipworm.
The adult worms bite the tissue of the intestine, actually embedding their “heads” inside, and suck blood there.

Whipworm egg isolated from a stool sample. Note the characteristic "double plug “appearance.

Whipworms developing in the soil. Again, note the characteristic “plugs” on either end of the egg.

Eggs are laid inside the large intestine and pass with the stool.
Once in the outside world, the eggs require about 2-4 weeks to form embryos and become capable of infecting a new host. (This means that contaminated soil is the source of infection, not fresh faeces).

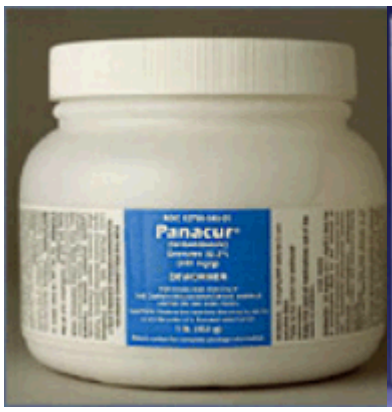


The new dog/host is infected by consuming the egg, usually during grooming. The egg hatches in the small intestine releasing a larva.

The larva dives into the local glandular tissue and after about a week emerges into the small intestine and is carried downstream into the large intestine with the digested food.
Once in the cecum or large intestine, its permanent home, it embeds in the tissue there, and after a total 74-87 days from the time the egg was swallowed, the young whipworm is ready to mate.
A few whipworms generally do not pose a problem for the dog/ host but if large numbers of worms are present embedding themselves in the large intestine tissue, tremendous inflammation can result leading to a bloody, gooey diarrhoea.
Usually there is not enough blood loss to be dangerous but the diarrhoea readily becomes chronic and hard to control.
A second syndrome of infection has emerged but is not well understood, this being symptoms mimicking those of Addison's disease (Hypoadrenocorticism).
Here, a waxing and waning weakness with inability to conserve salt ultimately creates a dehydration crisis.
The syndrome mimics Addison's disease in every way except that testing for Addison's disease will be negative and deworming yields a complete recovery.
Because female whipworms only **periodically** lay eggs (whereas other female worms lay eggs continuously), a faecal sample tested may easily be negative for eggs.
This makes the confirmation of a whipworm infection a challenge.
It is common to deworm for whipworms if the symptoms are suggestive of the whipworm presence even if the faecal test is negative.

Most common deworming agents **do not work on whipworms** so something special must be selected.
The most common products are fenbendazole (Panacur®), and febantel (Drontal Plus®).
Because of the long maturation cycle of young worms, a second deworming two and a half month or so after the first deworming is needed to fully clear the infection (easy to forget).

Often another deworming in between these doses is recommended to further control the whipworm numbers.



Panacur

Drontal Plus

Sentinel

Interceptor

<u>Soil contaminated by whipworm eggs is contaminated for years.</u>
It is virtually impossible to remove the eggs from the soil or kill them. Happily, however, this is one pet intestinal parasite that is not readily transmissible to humans.