



Hookworms & Your Health

Animal hookworms (*Ancylostoma* and *Uncinaria* species) are common parasites of dogs and cats (up to 36 percent of pets are infected). In particular, puppies and kittens are often infected regardless of their quality of care. Pets can get infected from many different sources (e.g., from their mother, eating infected rodents, and contacting soil contaminated with infected feces). Some animals may not show signs of illness, while others may have pale gums, weight loss, or diarrhea. Animal hookworms are the most common cause of the human disease, *cutaneous larva migrans*. Hookworm infection is more common in southeastern states near the Gulf Coast and in some tropical travel destinations.



To prevent infections with hookworms, avoid walking barefoot on sand or soil.

Disease Highlights:

- **Transmission:** People get sick when their skin comes in direct contact with contaminated soil (such as walking barefoot in areas contaminated by hookworms). Illness can also occur by accidentally eating dirt or other objects contaminated with feces.
- **Risk to Humans:** People at highest risk are those who live or visit areas where hookworms are commonly found and whose hobbies or work puts them in prolonged contact with moist soil or sand (such as children, sunbathers, plumbers, and electricians).
- **Signs in Humans:** People commonly report red, itchy, and sometimes painful lines under the skin. Disease in people commonly affects the legs, buttocks, and hands.

How to Reduce the Risk of Infection:

- If you are in areas contaminated with animal feces, avoid prolonged bare skin contact with moist soil or sand. Protect your bare skin by wearing gloves and footwear. This is especially important when working or vacationing in locations where hookworm infection is more common.
- Teach children not to put dirt or other objects in their mouth when playing outside.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds after playing outside, touching animals, and cleaning litter boxes.
- Prevent your pet from defecating in children's play areas, especially beaches and playgrounds. Cover children's sandboxes when not in use to prevent animals from defecating in them.
- Clean up your dog's feces immediately when in public places or children's play areas. Frequently clean your yard of feces. Double bag feces and put them in a closed trash container for disposal. Waste can also be incinerated.
- To decrease your cat's risk of infection, prevent it from hunting rodents by keeping it indoors. To prevent your cat from getting re-infected (which is especially important after deworming), scoop the litter box daily, and clean the litter box once a week as follows: 1) double bag all litter and place in your trash can; 2) wash the box with soap and water; 3) disinfect the box for 10 minutes with a household cleaner containing bleach; 4) rinse thoroughly; 5) dry; 6) add fresh litter.
- Take all pets to a veterinarian regularly for testing and year-round deworming. All pets should receive a fecal exam at least once or twice a year.

If you think you or your child accidentally ate dirt or objects contaminated with dog or cat feces, call your health care provider.

For More Information Visit:

CFSPH Animal Disease Information at www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/fastfacts.php

CAPC Parasite Recommendations at www.capcvet.org/

CDC Healthy Pets Healthy People at www.cdc.gov/healthypets/

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