

Slugs and Snails and unlikely tales.....

A common theme in my consulting room is that of parasitic worms and how to treat them. There are many types of worm that our pets can get and unfortunately there is, as yet, no one treatment that kills them all. It has been suggested to me over the years that all sorts of odd things will cure your pet of worms, garlic being the commonest, but there is no evidence of them having any effect. Some worms are transmissible to humans so it is important we de-worm our pets regularly, for this reason, as well as the harm it does to them.

This reminds me of a story I heard years ago about a client who claimed he could not catch worms himself. He had filled up 4 containers with 4 different things; alcohol, cigarette smoke, chocolate sauce and soil. He had then placed a worm in each container. All the worms had died apart from the worm in the soil. The client claimed, that as he drank, smoked and ate chocolate, that he therefore could not catch worms!! A likely story!!

However more seriously there have been increasing reports of the spread of the dog lungworm 'Angiostrongylus vasorum' throughout the country.

- ┌ Dogs can become infected with this life-threatening parasite by swallowing infected slugs and snails
- ┌ Slugs and snails can be very small; even if dogs don't eat slugs and snails on purpose, they may do accidentally when eating grass, drinking from outdoor water bowls, rummaging in undergrowth or playing with a toy outdoors



- ┐ *Angiostrongylus vasorum* (lungworm) resides in the heart and blood vessels of the lungs and can be fatal to dogs
- ┐ These lungworm adults are slender worms of around 2.5cm in length but they are never seen as they remain inside the infected dog or fox. The larvae, which are passed out in the faeces, are also impossible to see as they are microscopic.

Symptoms can be varied, but can include, coughing, tiring easily, weight loss, poor appetite, vomiting, diarrhoea and excessive bleeding from minor wounds and seizures. A dog may show one or any combination of these symptoms.

- ┐ If treatment is initiated early enough, dogs can go on to make a full recovery.
- ┐ If left untreated, this parasite can be fatal to dogs.
- ┐ Even after successful treatment, re-infection is possible so on-going preventative treatment should be considered.

Angiostrongylus vasorum (lungworm) is not considered a threat to human health.

Normal 'over the counter' de-worming products are not effective against lungworm. If you wish to prevent lungworm in your dog you will need to discuss this with your Veterinary Surgeon. If you think your dog actually has lungworm then a more urgent appointment should be scheduled. But, as with most things, prevention is better than cure!

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