

# Pet-to-people worms

How to avoid transmission of worms from pets to people

**P**et owners sometimes worry about "getting worms" from pets. It is possible, but preventable by simple measures. There are several different worms that can infect dogs and cats. People, usually children, can become infected with pet-associated worms by:

- Ingesting parasite eggs from soil, hands or objects contaminated by dog or cat feces. Roundworms (*Toxocara canis* and *cati*) and tapeworms (*Echinococcus spp.*) can be spread in this manner. Most cases involve young children eating dirt contaminated with animal feces.

- Direct skin contact with hookworm larvae (*Ancylostoma spp.*) from soil contaminated by dog or cat feces.

- Ingesting a flea harboring larvae of the dog and cat tapeworm (*Dipylidium caninum*). Spread of infection to human beings is rare.

## Prevention

To prevent human infection with pet-associated worms:

**Deworm pups early.** Pups may start passing roundworm eggs as early as three weeks of age. Deworm, under veterinary direction, all pups at two to three weeks of age and repeat treatment every two weeks until the pups are three months old. The mother dog should be treated at the same time pups are.

Cat roundworms do not start laying eggs as quickly as dog roundworms. Therefore, deworming kittens, beginning at six weeks of age, is sufficient from a public health standpoint.

**Keep children away from contamination.** Keep young children away from areas contaminated with feces and encourage them to wash their hands after play and before eating. Sandboxes should be covered when not in use. Prevent children from eating dirt.

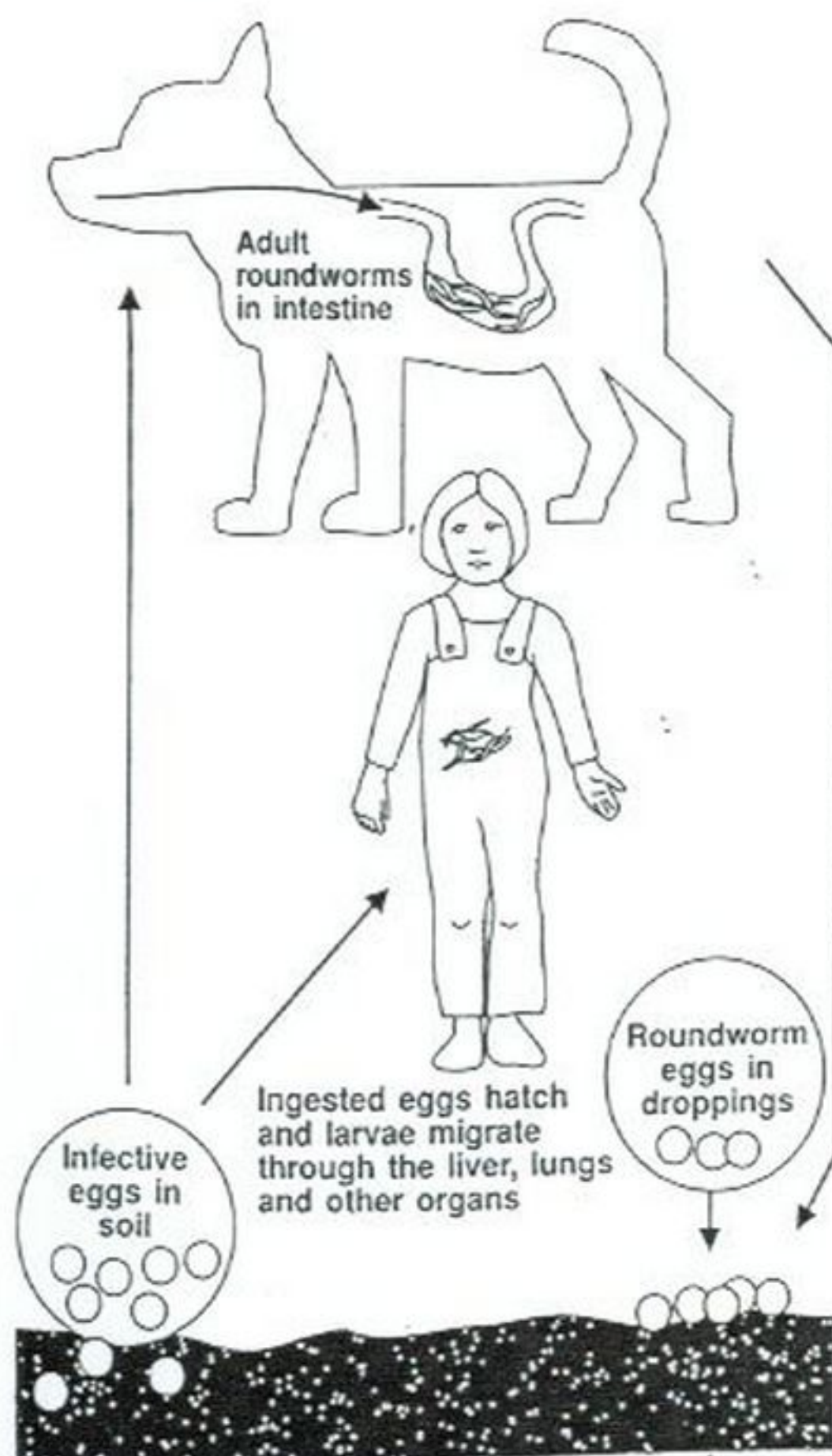
**Have new pets checked.** Have your veterinarian do a physical exam, including a fecal test, as soon as you acquire a new cat or dog. Pups and kittens acquired at six to eight weeks of age should be dewormed at least twice, two weeks apart.

**Have adult pets checked annually.** Have your veterinarian check a stool sample from adult

pets once a year, as part of an annual physical exam.

**Advocate community measures.** Support ordinances aimed at preventing indiscriminate defecation by dogs and cats.

Finally, be aware that there are other ways people can become infected with intestinal parasites (worms). People can also "get worms" from other people and from eating undercooked meat or seafood. **PV**



People, usually children, can "get worms" from eating dirt contaminated by dog or cat feces.