

Are lungworms something you should know about?

Guelph, ON

Whether you take your dog or your cat to the vet, you have probably heard something about worms. Part of a complete pet health strategy includes protecting pets from the parasites in your area. Treating and preventing intestinal worms and heartworm is part of regular care for pets. With changes in climate, wildlife ranges and travel patterns, we can see new parasites show up that haven't been a concern for pets in the past. Lungworms are some of these new parasites.

The name lungworm is given to a number of different parasites in Canada. Broadly, these worms live in the lungs of dogs and cats. Generally, these worms live in the lungs and airways, leading to irritation, inflammation and coughing. This can look like other conditions that cause coughing, including canine cough ("kennel cough") and feline asthma. Some lungworms can also cause a wider variety of clinical signs including neurologic, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and bleeding disorders and can even be fatal for infected dogs.

Two of the lungworms seen in dogs are fox lungworm (*Crenosoma vulpis*) and French heartworm (*Angiostrongylus vasorum*). Foxes can carry these parasites and pass larvae in their feces. Dogs get infected from eating the larvae from the feces of infected foxes. This happens when the dog eats slugs, snails or frogs. Dogs can even get infected simply by licking slime from toys or water bowls that slugs and snails have climbed on. In areas with slugs/snails and foxes, pet owners should talk to their veterinarian about preventive options for their pet. If your dog is already coughing, your veterinarian can discuss options for testing and treatment.

Cats can get infected in much the same ways and can also be infected when eating prey like mice and birds that have eaten infected snails and slugs. They have their own varieties of lungworms, including the cat lungworm (*Aelurostrongylus abstrusus*). If your cat has access to the outdoors, or has been coughing, your veterinarian can help you with the best options for your pet.

Just like in human medicine, health risks and solutions continue to change for our canine and feline family members. Ensuring regular visits with your veterinary healthcare team is the best way to protect your pet.

For more information:

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Slugs and snails pose a risk to pets. Ask about lungworm in your area.