



## WHIPWORM PARASITISM

### ABOUT THE DISEASE

The canine **whipworm**, *Trichuris vulpis*, is a common cause of irritation to the colon which can cause loose, mucoid, and sometimes bloody diarrhea (large bowel diarrhea). **Whipworms** can infect dogs of all ages but are typically seen with minimal clinical signs in light infections. In more severe cases, patients may have electrolyte imbalances that mimic poor adrenal function.

Feline **whipworms** exist (*T. campanula* & *T. serrata*) but are rare and typically not associated with clinical signs.

Like most intestinal parasites, microscopic eggs of **whipworms** are shed into the feces from infected patients. Once in the environment, these eggs require 2-4 weeks before they become infectious, but may remain in the environment for up to 4-5 months. Other patients are then infected by directly ingesting this infectious stage of microscopic parasite eggs.

Due to their long environmental life span, it is common for many patients to become re-infected even after treatment. It is important that feces from all patients, especially those infected, is collected immediately.

### OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Once patients are infected, it may take up to three months before they start to shed parasite eggs in the stool. Also, parasite eggs are not constantly shed throughout the life cycle of the **whipworm**.

Fecal floatation is still the most effective means of diagnosing a **whipworm** parasitism.

### TREATMENT

Patients need to be treated with deworming medications like fenbendazole or febantel to cover whipworm infections but should be treated at three weeks and three months to cover the full life cycle of the parasites.

Due to the potential for high environmental exposure, some patients are treated every 2-3 months if they frequent high-risk areas (dog parks, public areas, campgrounds, etc.).

Other medications exist (milbemycin, moxidectin, selamectin, etc.) to help with monthly deworming which are found in heartworm preventatives.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Rapid removal of feces from the environment will help reduce potential for re-infection.