

Points on Pets: Protecting puppies against parasites

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: We were recently surprised when our veterinarian told us that our puppy needed to be treated over a three week period for a disease caused by an internal parasite called isospora. Our veterinarian made the diagnosis while she was conducting a routine examination of our puppy's stool sample. We did not know that our puppy had any problems. He is full of energy, growing rapidly, and seems to be very normal.

Is isospora a serious disease? Should we be concerned? Since this is our first puppy, we are pretty naive.

A: New puppy owners are often surprised when their veterinarians diagnose an intestinal parasite during a routine fecal examination. However, this is why routine fecal examinations are recommended. It is not unusual for puppies to have internal parasites without external signs of illness being apparent to their owners.

Isospora is a species of a single cell intestinal parasite commonly referred to as coccidia. Watery diarrhea containing blood is the most commonly seen clinical sign seen in puppies with coccidia. Because puppies can rapidly become dehydrated, this can soon become a life threatening disease. Coccidia cause diarrhea by destroying the cells on the inner lining of the intestinal tract. Because many older dogs have developed immunity against coccidia, they are not adversely affected by the disease.

Coccidiosis is usually diagnosed by finding the causative organisms in fecal samples while looking through a microscope. Treatment of dogs with coccidia usually includes the administration of a coccidiostat over a two or three week period and supportive therapy for the clinical signs if necessary. It is interesting that although the medications do not actually kill the coccidia, they greatly reduce the number of infective organisms by stopping their reproduction and eventually otherwise healthy puppies develop immunity to the disease. Most veterinarians recommend treating dogs with coccidia in their stools even if clinical signs are not apparent at the time of diagnosis.

Since coccidiosis is contagious between animals, all fecal samples should be promptly picked up and disposed of properly. Fortunately, isospora are not transmitted to people from animals. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice regarding the control of internal and external parasites in your new four-footed family member.

Q: Our calico-colored cat has had several litters of kittens. We have noticed that while some of her female offspring look like her, none of her male kittens have her color pattern. Is the calico color pattern limited to female cats?

A. Calico cats are tortoiseshell cats (that is cats with a mixture of red and black hairs) that have random

patches of white in their hair coats. Although these hairs are usually clumped together to form well-defined patches, they can be intermingled over the entire body.

Almost all tortoiseshell cats are females. Tortoiseshell hair coats are rare in male cats and almost all male cats with this hair coloration pattern are sterile. The calico and tortoiseshell hair patterns are seen in almost all of the pedigree varieties of domestic cats. These patterns are very common in mongrel cats.

Send e-mail to copleysd@copleynews.com or write to Pets, Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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