

Tapeworms

Tapeworms are long, flat worms that attach themselves to your dog's intestines. A tapeworm body consists of multiple parts, or segments, each with its own reproductive organs. Tapeworm infections are usually diagnosed by finding segments—which appear as small white worms that may look like grains of rice or seeds—on the rear end of your dog, in your dog's feces, or where your dog lives and sleeps.

There are several different kinds, or species, of tapeworms that can infect your dog, each with stage(s) in a different intermediate (in-between) host, which the dog eats to become infected. *Dipylidium caninum* is a tapeworm that uses fleas as its intermediate host, whereas *Taenia* and *Echinococcus* species use small rodents (mice, rats, squirrels), rabbits, or large animals (such as deer or sheep) as their intermediate hosts.

Symptoms:

Dogs with tapeworm infections usually are not sick and do not lose weight from the worms. Contrary to popular belief, dogs that “scoot” on their rear ends are generally doing it for reasons other than having tapeworms, such as blocked or irritated anal sacs (pouches located in your dog's rear end) or other skin inflammation of the rear.

Treatment:

Try to keep your dog from coming in contact with intermediate hosts that contain tapeworm larvae. Because fleas are an intermediate host for the most common kind of tapeworm, consistent, safe, and effective flea control is an essential prevention measure.

If you think your dog is infected with tapeworms, call your veterinarian for an appointment to get an accurate diagnosis and safe, effective treatment options.

To prevent *Taenia* and *Dipylidium* tapeworm infections in dogs, administer a monthly heartworm preventive that contains a drug specific for tapeworm infections.

Effect on Humans:

Certain tapeworms found in dogs or cats may cause serious disease in humans. Fortunately, these tapeworms (*Echinococcus* species) are uncommon in the United States and are readily treated by prescriptions available from your veterinarian. There are rare reports of *Dipylidium* (a common tapeworm in pets) infections in children, but these infections are not associated with significant disease.

For more information about human infections, please visit www.cdc.gov/parasites.