Your Pet Health Source

veterinarian sponsored pet healthcare information

Spring 2008

This newsletter has been provided to you by your veterinarian to promote healthcare for your pet. It aims to inform you, the pet owner - with veterinary professional insights and best-practices for leading pet healthcare.

CARING FOR OUR PETS ISN'T EASY

Fluffy didn't eat breakfast and Shadow acts like he's starving. Rover scratched his left ear twice today. Maggie is shedding like crazy. Max won't lie down. Sammy doesn't want to go for a walk.

Would you recognize any of the above behaviours as signs that your pet's health may need attention?

Even when our pets seem healthy, they may be in need of veterinary attention. Warm weather means some special consideration for our pets. Fleas, heartworms and intestinal parasites are all summertime risks. For some pets, warm weather may also bring allergies.

Together, pet owners and their veterinarians can help keep pets at their healthiest and happiest through the summer months and for a lifetime.

HEARTWORM

Springtime is heartworm testing time.

Spread by mosquitoes, heartworms can infect your pets and cause life-threatening illness. The right combination of testing and prevention can protect your pet from this potentially deadly disease.

Testing for heartworm in dogs in Ontario is commonly performed in the spring. Although naturally more resistant to heartworm infection, cats can become infected as well. Testing methods are different for cats; please talk to your vet about heartworm and your cat.

Blood samples drawn for heartworm testing can also be used for wellness testing. Fecal testing and urinalysis compliment wellness testing to provide an in-depth view of your pet's health.

Heartworms damage the heart and lungs. Signs of infection include:

> weight loss
> lethargy
> exercise intolerance
> coughing

ALLERGIES

When summer comes and pets start to itch, many owners wonder if fleas are the source of the problem. While fleas can cause your pet a great deal of discomfort, there are many other causes for itch.

Spring and summer can mean the beginning of allergy season for many people. Pets can suffer from allergies too. Pets can have allergies to both foods and inhaled allergens like pollens, moulds and dust mites.

Food allergies in dogs and cats can appear as itchy skin and feet as well as ear infections. Some pets may also experience intestinal upset. Like people, dogs and cats often develop allergies to foods they have been eating for years. When food allergies are suspected, a food trial is used to help resolve the problem. A food containing a new or novel protein and carbohydrate that your pet has not eaten before can be used; this can include salmon, venison and even kangaroo along with a carbohydrate like barley, potato or oatmeal. Other diets are available where the protein is hydrolyzed, or made too small for the immune system to respond. The new food is fed for at least 8 weeks to see if the pet improves while eating the new food.

Atopy (inhaled allergens) can also make your dog or cat extremely itchy and can be the cause of raw, itchy, infected skin. While medications can sometimes be used to make your pet feel better, determining what your pet is allergic to can be more helpful long term. Several testing methods are available and once your pet's allergies have been determined, your veterinarian will design a treatment plan that may involve medication, immunotherapy (allergy shots), or both.

There are reasons aside from allergies for pets to be itchy. If your pet is itchy and scratchy, please talk to your vet about taking the next step to help them feel better.

Insect Bites

Dogs and cats sometimes try to eat or play with bees and other insects. Pets can react severely to insect bites. Contact your veterinarian if you notice any sudden swelling on your pet's face, paws or body.

INTESTINAL PARASITES

In the summer, we often think of fleas and ticks as parasites that might harm our pets and even our families. While appropriate flea and tick control is necessary, there are other less visible parasites that can also pose a threat. These are intestinal worms. In many cases, infected pets do not show any signs.

Roundworms

Roundworms are very common, especially in puppies and kittens. Puppies often become infected before they are born and kittens become infected through their mother's milk shortly after birth. Roundworms live in the pet's intestine and can cause pain and discomfort . These roundworms also lay eggs that are passed in your pet's feces. If feces are not picked up, these tiny eggs end up on your lawn, in the park and other places children play. If these eggs are accidentally ingested, the roundworms can develop and cause a condition known as *visceral* larval migrans.

Hookworms

Hookworms also live in our pet's intestines. These eggs are also passed in feces. Once in the environment, they hatch and release larvae. Larvae can burrow through skin and cause a condition known as *cutaneous* larval migrans.

Tapeworms

Cats and dogs get tapeworms either from eating infected wildlife like mice and birds or from eating fleas. Since flea bites are itchy, cats and dogs chew at their skin and can swallow a flea in the process. People can also be infected with tapeworm if they either eat a flea or swallow infected flea material that has been transferred when they are licked by a pet with fleas.

These intestinal parasites, and others, pose a risk both to pets and people. There are effective means of controlling this risk for your furry and not so furry family members. Talk to your vet about intestinal parasites and zoonosis (illnesses spread from pets to humans) and the available options for treatment and prevention!

This *Your Pet's Health Bulletin* Newsletter is published by Solaris Healthcare and has been generously sponsored by your caring veterinarian. **For more information on how you can support your pet's healthcare more actively, please call your veterinarian. Always remember; together, we have a responsibility for our pets.**