

## Whipworm Infection

### Trichuriasis

#### What is whipworm infection and what causes it?

Whipworms are a family of parasites that cause a disease called trichuriasis (trick-eer-eye-ah-sis). Worm larvae and adults can live in the intestine of animals or people and cause intestinal disease. The adult worms lay eggs, which are shed in the feces of infested individuals and can serve to further spread the disease. Whipworms are found worldwide, especially in warm, humid climates.

#### What animals get whipworms?

Whipworms are found in domestic and wild canine species (e.g. dogs, coyotes, and wolves). They can also be found in domestic pigs and wild boars. Different whipworm species infest different animal species; so that whipworms that infect dogs and pigs are not the same. There is not transmission of whipworms between dogs and swine. Non-human primates and other animal species can also get whipworms.

#### How can my animal get whipworms?

Animals get whipworms by ingesting (**oral**) worm eggs which develop into larval then adult worms. Eggs are passed in the feces of an infested animal and this contamination of the environment is the source of exposure for susceptible animals. Under ideal conditions, whipworm eggs can survive in the environment for years.

#### How do whipworms affect my animal?

Most cases of whipworm infestation show no signs of illness. Some animals may be in poor condition (rough hair coat, thin body) or have reduced performance. Heavy parasite infestations can cause diarrhea, with or without blood, weight loss, and unthriftiness. In these cases, the worms can also cause blood loss or anemia.

#### Can I get whipworms?

Humans can get whipworms by ingesting (**oral**) soil or water contaminated by the feces of infected animals or people. Most cases in humans do not show symptoms of illness. Heavy infections can cause gastrointestinal signs, especially in children. These can include abdominal pain, diarrhea, and rectal prolapse; growth retardation is also possible.

#### Who should I contact, if I suspect whipworms?

##### In Animals –

Contact your veterinarian.

##### In Humans –

Contact your physician.

#### How can I protect my animal from whipworms?

Housing animals in a manner to minimize exposure to contaminated soil and to facilitate sanitation and feces removal is the best prevention method.

#### How can I protect myself from whipworms?

Good hygiene and treatment of infected animals will reduce the chance of human exposure. Children should not be allowed to play in areas contaminated with animal feces and hand-washing after playing with pets is important.

#### For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Trichuriasis. at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

CDC website. Whipworm infection at <http://www.dpd.cdc.gov/dpdx/HTML/Trichuriasis.htm>

**Whipworms**  
are parasites that cause  
intestinal problems  
in animals.  
Humans can ingest the  
worm eggs from fecally  
contaminated soil.





Center photos shows whip shaped adult worms and microscopic egg (small square).