

Lungworm

Infestation with lungworm (*Angiostrongylus vasorum*) is becoming an increasingly serious problem in dogs. Initially confined to specific areas, lungworms are now found throughout the UK.

Adult lungworms are found in the blood vessels which lead from the right side of the heart to the lungs. They can live for many years, intermittently laying eggs throughout the lifetime of their host. These eggs hatch into larvae that cause damage as they travel through the lungs before being coughed up and swallowed, passing out into the environment in the dog's faeces.

Slugs and snails are infected as they eat the faeces and the larval lungworms continue their development. Due to their habit of eating slugs and snails, frogs may also be infected.

The life cycle is then completed when the dog eats infected slugs, snails or frogs or lick the slime trails left by these secondary hosts on plants, bowls, toys and bones left outdoors or through drinking from puddles.

Reducing the number of slugs and snails in your pet's immediate environment will obviously help to decrease risk but avoid using slug pellets as these can be very toxic to dogs and cats. Instead, use environmentally friendly control methods and ensure that dog faeces are cleared from your garden daily.

Many dogs with this potentially fatal problem show either no clinical signs at all or only vague symptoms that can be confused with other conditions.

Please contact the surgery on 01435 864422 for more information or advice. www.heathfieldvets.co.uk

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How can I tell if my dog has lungworms?

1. Non-specific signs such as: decreased appetite, weight loss, vomiting and diarrhoea
2. Cardio-respiratory signs such as coughing, rapid or difficult breathing, exercise intolerance, fainting, heart problems
3. Neurological signs may include behavioural changes, depression, spinal pain, blindness, lack of coordination, circling, collapse, fits, paralysis
4. Bleeding signs such as excessive bruising or bleeding after minor wounds or surgery, nosebleeds, blood blisters, bleeding into the eyes, vomiting blood or anaemia

Persistent and undiagnosed lungworm infestation may also lead to serious life-threatening blood disorders such as disseminated intravascular coagulation or immune mediated thrombocytopaenia.

Prevention is better than cure

Lungworm larvae can be detected by examining faeces and we may recommend collecting samples for testing if we believe that your dog is affected.

However the best advice is to assume that your dog might be affected and treat routinely, just as you do for other worms. If you are using Advocate spot on treatment every month then you need take no further action. If not, then you might like to ask for advice as to the best treatment for your dog.