

Health Matters - Lungworm Update

Lungworm is caused by ingestion of worm larvae, carried by slugs and snails, of a small parasitic worm *Angiostrongylus vasorum*. It appears to be an emerging disease in the UK which is thought to be a consequence of our generally damper and more temperate climate, favouring mollusc populations (although, as I write this in the middle of a heatwave, temperate is not the first word that springs to mind). The urbanization of foxes may also play a role since, like dogs, they can also become infected and aid disease spread. Whilst lungworm can affect dogs of any age, more cases tend to be seen in the more active and inquisitive youngsters.

Dogs ingest the 3rd stage larvae (L3) from the environment which then travel, via the intestines and liver, before developing into adults in the heart and major vessels. These then produce 1st stage (L1) larvae which migrate through the lungs to the trachea, or windpipe, where they are coughed up and swallowed before passing out into the environment, via the intestines, to be taken up by slugs & snails where they transform into the infective L3 stage and the cycle starts again.

Clinical signs related to infection can include:

- I Exercise intolerance due to presence of lungworms in the heart and major blood vessels
- I Respiratory disease such as coughing due to lungworm larvae migrating through lung tissue and causing inflammation

- I Bleeding tendencies which may be due to secretion of products by the worms which enable them to live more successfully in the cardiovascular system.

- I Neurological disease due to aberrant larvae penetrating tissues such as the brain and spinal cord.

Until recently, diagnosis involved searching for the larvae in serial faecal samples. More recently, Idexx Laboratories have developed a test which your vet can do at the surgery using a blood sample and, initial research suggests, that this is a quick and reliable test.

Advocate Spot-on used monthly is the only UK licensed product for both prevention and treatment of infection of *A. vasorum*. Panacur has a license for treatment of lungworm (although not specifically for *A. vasorum*) and is used for seven consecutive days.

My personal feeling is that prevention is preferable. I have had one case of lungworm in a young adult dog which resulted in bleeding tendencies (which resolved with treatment) and larvae becoming encysted in the brain tissue. Treatment at this stage does not affect the larvae and performing surgery to remove them would be too risky. Fortunately this dog

does now lead a relatively normal life although he will always need treatment for epilepsy which appeared to develop as a consequence of the infection.

Alyson Richardson, BVSc CertVD MRCVS
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Maslands contacted me this week to thank the Club for placing our business with them and I again mentioned the PDF's we have requested of the old Newsletters. I'm almost losing the will to live!!

Cheers,
Joan.