

Stay Ahead of Snails and Slugs

Slugs and snails can transmit potentially deadly lungworm infection to dogs. With our weather becoming warmer and wetter, we are likely to see more of them around. If we appreciate the nature and implications of the link between dogs and these slimy creatures, we can act to protect our pet dogs.



The adult lungworm *Angiostrongylus vasorum* measures up to an inch long. They live inside the major vessels carrying blood from the heart to the lungs and sometimes in the

associated chambers of the heart. They breed in these vessels and lay eggs which reach the finer blood vessels where they hatch into first stage larvae. The larvae penetrate the vessel walls and enter the tissues of the lung from where they are coughed up, swallowed and eventually expelled with faeces. Foxes are known to contribute to the spread of this infection.

The larvae in the dog faeces find their way into some slugs and snails, which if consumed by dogs transmit the infection. Dogs may eat slugs and snails voluntarily or accidentally when rummaging through undergrowth, eating grass, by drinking from puddles or outdoor water bowls or picking them up from toys. It is also suggested that live larvae can be present in the slime track left by the snail and thus dogs eating such slime covered grass can be infected. The larvae eaten with slugs and snails

mature in the bowel and ultimately reach the blood vessels of slugs to complete the life cycle.

Symptoms may vary depending on the level of infection. Some dogs may show no symptoms if the infection is very light. Others may display vague symptoms like weight loss or intermittent lethargy and vomiting. In others it may develop into prominent cardio-respiratory symptoms like cough, exercise intolerance, difficulty breathing, nose bleed and coughing up of blood. Some dogs develop neurological signs like spinal pain, paralysis and fits.

Confirmatory diagnosis depends on demonstration of larval worms in faeces, which is a tedious test. At Sunrise we use an in-house modern and very specific laboratory test to facilitate diagnosis of this disease.

The lungworm infection can be prevented and treated by using appropriate worming medication. However, such medicines are not available over the counter.

There is no point in giving worming treatment to a dog just for the sake of it. It is important to ensure that the worming treatment given is really effective and broad spectrum to address all potential worm related threats.

Let us be at least a step ahead of slugs and snails. If I can be of any help in this regard, please do not hesitate to get in touch on 01257 463 142.

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