



There is more to dog faeces than an unpleasant mess

Scientific studies suggest that as many as one to four percent of adults in the country could be infected with dog worm *Toxocara* without showing any symptoms.

This figure could be much higher for children as one study reported that of the cases of clinical disease diagnosed each year nearly all of them are children, mostly between 18 months to 5 years of age.

Eye disorders are the most commonly reported conditions in humans infected with the dog worm *Toxocara*. This is caused by the immature stages of the worm reaching the eye through the blood vessel supplying the retina, the image producing membrane within the eye, leading to detachment of the retina, growth of localised tumours and potentially blindness.

The human infection has also been related to flu-like symptoms, vague aches, nausea, dizziness, asthma, epileptic fits and paralysis. As some of the symptoms can be non-specific, it is quite likely that a number of *Toxocara* cases go unrecognised and unreported.

A surprising fact about the human infection is that about half of the most serious cases of *Toxocariasis*, such as blindness, occur in families who have never owned a dog or a cat.

Infection develops by unknowingly swallowing *Toxocara* eggs, which are microscopic. The infection is transmitted through hands, but also with the dogs themselves or through objects like wheels of toys and shoes etc.

A single mess of an untreated dog can contain as many as one million worm eggs and that of puppies between 2-6 weeks of age can contain many times more. These worm eggs are resistant to freezing and disinfectants and can survive up to two years or even longer. As the faeces degrade, soil and sand continue to harbour the worm eggs.



The most infected soil samples are found in the vicinity of children's play areas, sports grounds, public parks, even though dogs are often banned from these areas, and on streets or street sides.

It is noteworthy that *Toxocara* eggs cannot cause infection until they start to develop to embryos, which is usually at least 2-3 weeks after they have been deposited by a dog. Therefore, freshly deposited faeces can quite safely be cleaned up after the dog.

In the interest of our family and public health it is important that we treat our dogs regularly for worms with reliably effective medications, try to keep them away from public spaces meant for children and most importantly always clean up after our dogs.

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