Parasites at a glance

Parasites can cause a variety of health problems for your pet—and even death. One of the biggest concerns is the potential for them to spread to humans. This handout lists common parasites in cats and dogs, the signs, detection, and whether they can spread to humans—these are known as zoonotic parasites.

Veterinarians divide parasites into two main categories—external (ectoparasites) and internal (endoparasites). Fleas, ticks, and mites are ectoparasites. Endoparasites, such as heartworms or tapeworms are often harder to detect but typically cause more severe disease. Here's a look at both:

	Signs and Complications	Zoonotic – Transmitted to Humans	Detection
Ectoparasites			
Fleas	➢ Mild to severe itching, scratching, biting, and chewing ➢ Flea saliva hypersensitivity or allergy and resulting skin problems ➢ The transmission of tapeworms ➢ Anemia and possible death in small animals.	Yes	Examination of the animal for adult fleas, flea dirt, or small black specks of dried flea feces. A blood test can detect a flea allergy.
Ticks	➢ Mild local irritation to severe anemia ➢ Transmission of other diseases to animal and humans – Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and *Ehrlichia*, among others	Yes	Examination of the animal
Mites and lice The three main types: sarcoptic mange, demodectic mange and *Cheyletiella*	➢ Itching, hair loss, dandruff or crusty lesions, and bleeding or oozing skin	Sarcoptic & *Cheyletiella*: Yes Demodex: No	Examination of animal and skin scrapings
Endoparasites			
Heartworms Transmitted through the bite of an infected mosquito	➢ May not exhibit signs until late in the course of the disease ➢ Coughing, difficulty breathing, panting, exercise intolerance, decreased activity level, and sudden death	No	Blood Test
Roundworms and Hookworms Live in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract; transmitted through fecal-oral contact from mother to offspring	➢ Diarrhea, anemia, and loss of body condition	Yes	➢ Fecal Examination ➢ Observation of Worms
Tapeworms Live in GI tract; transmitted from ingestion of fleas, rodents and rabbits	➢ None to diarrhea, weight loss, and poor body condition	No	➢ Observation of tapeworm segments in freshly passed feces ➢ Fecal examination

Parasite Treatments

Our clinic offers both preventative and curative treatments for parasites. We prefer to prevent parasites to save your pet the discomfort of parasite infestation and minimize your family's risk. Speak with your veterinarian to learn which products are right for your pet.

Handout courtesy of Dr. Karen Blakely of All Pets Veterinary Clinic in Macomb , Ill.