

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:

Ectoparasites (External)	Signs & Complications	Zoonotic? (spread to humans)	Detection
Fleas 	<input type="checkbox"/> Mild to severe itching, scratching, biting, chewing <input type="checkbox"/> Flea saliva hypersensitivity or allergy & resulting skin problems <input type="checkbox"/> The transmission of tapeworms <input type="checkbox"/> Anemia and possible death in young or small animals	NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examination of your pet for adult fleas, flea dirt or small black specks of dried flea feces •Flea feces will turn rusty brown with the addition of water •A blood test can detect a flea allergy
Ticks 	<input type="checkbox"/> Mild local irritation to severe anemia <input type="checkbox"/> Transmission of other diseases to animals and humans—Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and <i>Ehrlichia</i> , among others	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Examination of your pet •Blood parasite test known as Idexx Snap 4DX test
Mites & Lice 	<input type="checkbox"/> Itching, hair loss, dandruff or crusty lesions, & bleeding or oozing skin	Some Mites Lice: NO	Examination of your pet and skin scrapings to look for 3 main types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sarcoptic mange •Demodectic mange •<i>Cheyletiella</i>
Endoparasites (Internal)	Signs & Complications	Zoonotic?	Detection
Heartworms 	<input type="checkbox"/> May not exhibit signs until late in the course of the disease <input type="checkbox"/> Coughing, difficulty breathing, panting, exercise intolerance, decreased activity level, and sudden death	NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Blood parasite test known as Idexx Snap 4DX test •Bloodwork and radiographs to determine the stage of the disease
Roundworms & Hookworms 	<input type="checkbox"/> Diarrhea, anemia, loss of body condition	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Fecal examination •Observation of worms
Tapeworms 	<input type="checkbox"/> None to diarrhea, weight loss, poor body condition	YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Observation of tapeworm segments in freshly passed feces •Fecal examination

Parasite treatments: AHSH offers both preventative and curative treatments for parasites. We prefer to help you prevent parasite infections to save your pet the discomfort and to minimize your family’s risk. Please speak with one of our veterinarians to learn which products are right for your pet.

Adapted from Dr. Karen Blakeley of All Pets Veterinary Clinic in Macomb, Ill.