HOOKWORM IN GREYHOUNDS

In recent years, multi drug resistant hookworm have been identified. The two species of hookworm affect dogs in Australia: Ancylostoma and Uncinaria. Hookworm can be deadly in large numbers. The worms have sharp, hook-like mouthparts that attach to the intestinal wall of their host and feed on their blood.

A dog may become infected when it swallows hookworm larvae. The larvae can also penetrate the skin and migrate to the intestine where they mature and complete their lifecycle. If a pregnant dog has hookworms, the pregnancy may reactivate the larvae. These larvae will enter the female's bloodstream and infect the puppies in utero, or they can get infected from the mother's milk.

The most significant problems related to hookworms are intestinal diseases or anaemia (blood loss). Blood loss results from the parasites ingesting blood from the intestinal capillaries and in sufficient quantities can be serious and life threatening.

Symptoms of hookworm

Pale gums, diarrhoea or weakness are common symptoms of hookworm infection. Some dogs experience significant weight loss, bloody diarrhoea, loss of appetite, difficulty breathing, lethargy and poor coat condition. Young animals are generally more severely affected. Skin irritation and itching, especially of the paws, can occur in heavily infested environments as the larvae burrow into the skin causing itchiness and discomfort.

Adult hookworms do not infect humans. However, the larvae can burrow into human skin or be ingested orally. This causes itchy inflammation of the skin and in very rare occasions hookworm will penetrate deeper tissues and partially mature in the human intestine which may result in inflammation of the small and large intestine (enterocolitis). Direct contact of human skin to hookworm infested soil is required for cutaneous transmission.

Fortunately, this does not occur often if optimal hygiene practices are carried out i.e. hand washing, wear gloves when cleaning up after pets, keep beds and bowls free of faecal contamination and, promptly picking up and disposing of pet's faecal matter. A regular worming schedule should be applied to all pets with effective, commercially available anthelminthics to minimise risks.

Worming schedule

Age of pet	Worming schedule
6 - 12 weeks	Every fortnight
12 weeks – 6 months	Every month
6 months onwards	Every 3 months for the lifespan of the pet

Understanding and managing hookworm

Multi-drug-resistant hookworms have been identified in both greyhound populations and the wider dog community. GAP takes a proactive approach to managing hookworm through ongoing monitoring, testing and preventative measures for all greyhounds in our care, both during their stay and following adoption.

As part of our commitment to the health and wellbeing of our greyhounds, we also provide education and guidance to help adopters understand hookworm, reduce the risk of reinfection and minimise environmental contamination.

Treating hookworm

There are three main classes of anthelmintic (worming) medications routinely used to treat hookworm infections in dogs:

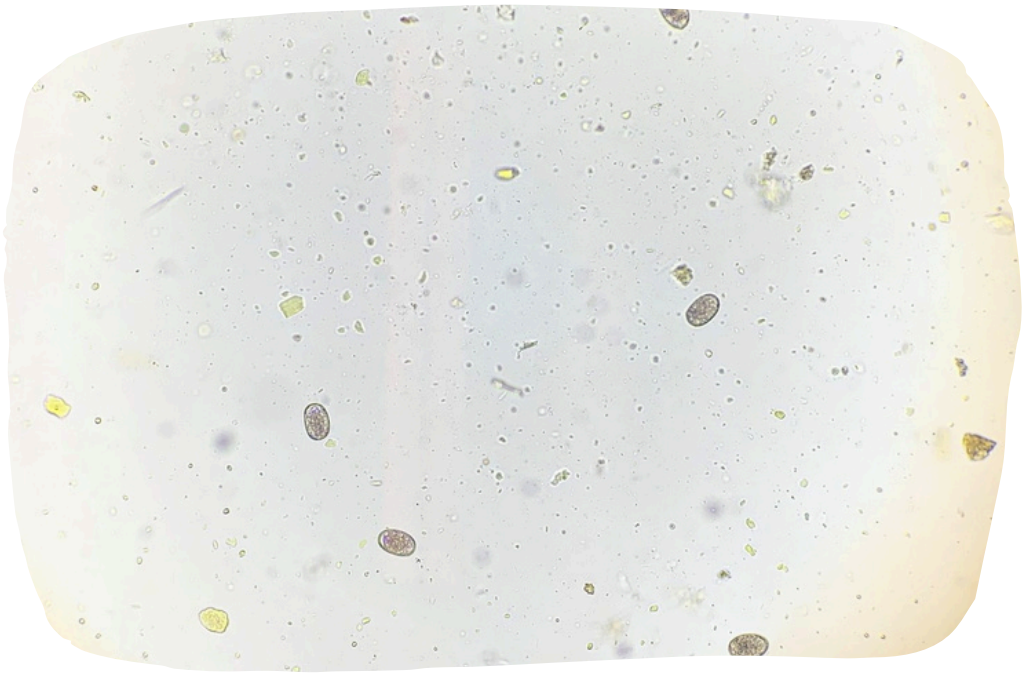
- Benzimidazoles, such as fenbendazole
- Macrocyclic lactones, such as milbemycin
- Tetrahydropyrimidines, such as pyrantel.

These medications may be used individually or in combination, depending on the dog's needs and veterinary advice. However, drug resistance can affect treatment effectiveness. Hookworm treatment should always be managed under the guidance of a veterinarian, with regular faecal egg count testing to monitor treatment response and help identify potential resistance.

Settling your greyhound into their new home

Bringing your greyhound home is an exciting time for both you and your new companion. However, the changes associated with settling into a new environment can also be stressful for dogs and their owners.

Stress can contribute to the reactivation of dormant (hypobiotic) hookworm larvae, potentially leading to reinfection. It is therefore important to monitor your greyhound's health, manage their needs during the settling-in period and follow any treatment or preventative measures recommended by GAP.

GAP will provide any medication considered necessary to support your greyhound's transition into their new home. Please remain alert to any signs of illness and take care to minimise environmental contamination by promptly collecting and disposing of your dog's faeces, both at home and in public spaces.

If you have any questions or concerns about hookworm, please speak with the GAP team or your local veterinarian.