

How much do your customers know?

When it comes to parasite control, working in the animal health industry means we are aware, or at least should be, of the potential animal health and zoonotic risks associated with companion animal parasites. What about our clients though? How much do they know and are they providing the appropriate treatments to mitigate the risks to their pets and their families?

Recent research from the University of Melbourne looked at the perceptions, practices and behaviours of dog owners in Australia when it comes to gastrointestinal parasites.¹ The study showed that the vast majority (>70%) of dog owners in Australia are not following best practice prophylaxis guidelines (i.e., monthly deworming) for canine endoparasites. Additionally, there was a significant proportion that did not follow optimal management practices including avoiding feeding raw meat diets and prompt and appropriate disposal of their dog's faeces. Whilst it is not possible to discern from this study the reasons for suboptimal parasite control, a potential reason lies in a failure of owners to understand the impacts of gastrointestinal parasites on the health of their dog, with only 60% perceiving gastrointestinal parasites to be very or extremely important for their dog's health. Concerningly, less than 50% of owners perceive canine worms as being very or extremely important for human health. Supporting the role for education in promoting positive health care outcomes, a previous survey of Queensland owners showed that those who were aware of the threat gastrointestinal parasites pose were more likely to deworm their dogs and adequately dispose of their dog's faeces.²

Protocols should address both animal health and human health risks of parasites



Another challenge identified in the study from the University of Melbourne is a lack of knowledge by pet owners of the particular products being used to control parasites. Whilst this in itself is not necessarily a concern, if this lack of knowledge extends to users administering products which are inappropriate for their circumstances, this could potentially have significant consequences. For example, of the owners who were able to name the parasiticide used to control gastrointestinal parasites, more than 20% named products which were only effective against ectoparasites.¹

References

1. Massetti, L. et al. (2023) Canine gastrointestinal parasites perceptions, practices, and behaviours: A survey of dog owners in Australia. *One Heal*, 17, 100587.
2. Nguyen, T. et al. (2021) Perceptions of dog owners towards canine gastrointestinal parasitism and associated human health risk in Southeast Queensland. *One Heal*, 12, 100226.
3. Palmer, C. S. et al. (2010) Intestinal parasites of dogs and cats in Australia: the veterinarian's perspective and pet owner awareness. *Vet J*, 183, 358–61.
4. Massetti, L. et al. (2022) Faecal prevalence, distribution and risk factors associated with canine soil-transmitted helminths contaminating urban parks across Australia. *Int J Parasitol*, 52, 637–646.

Whilst this may be misattribution, it does raise the concern that despite having the best intentions, some owners may be placing their pets, and potentially the humans with which they share an environment, at risk. This concern also extends to understanding the spectrum of coverage of an endoparasiticide. Previous studies in Australia demonstrated that a third of pet owners used products that relied on pyrantel alone to control gastrointestinal nematodes.³ As this active ingredient is not effective against whipworm (shown in a recent Australian study to be the second most common canine worm species found in dog parks⁴), such products may not be the ideal choice in Australia, and reliance on these products alone to control gastrointestinal worms may put animal health at risk (although fortunately not human health, as canine whipworm is not considered a zoonosis).

Helping pet owners make the right choices

It is clear from the above that it is important for pet owners to understand the “why” behind parasite control recommendations to ensure they are using parasite control products appropriately. Finding time for these conversations can be hard in a busy clinic. To help address this challenge, Boehringer Ingelheim has created the PetGard Pro tool. This free, interactive digital tool provides owners with personalised risk assessment and control recommendations for their pet based upon their answers to a small number of questions regarding risk factors for parasitism, such as their pet's age, sex, location, lifestyle and behaviour. The tool and recommendations were developed in consultation with Veterinary Parasitologist Dr Vito Colella from the University of Melbourne and take into account recommendations from a number of local and global guidelines (Australian Paralysis Tick Guidelines 2024, Australian Companion Animal Zoonoses Guidelines 2021, European Scientific Counsel Companion Animal Parasites 2022). The tool is quick, easy and fun to use and can be found on the NexGard website (www.nexgard.com.au/petgardpro).



Understanding the risk and the importance of parasite control is just the first hurdle; we then need to ensure pet owners are using products with the appropriate spectrum of coverage and at the appropriate interval to manage the parasites their pets are likely to encounter.

With so many products available, all with differing label claims and indications, it can be hard to keep track with which product does what. By scanning the QR code below you can access a comparison chart listing product claims and important information (e.g., minimum starting age and body weight, safety in breeding animals etc.) for the most commonly used endectoparasitides in Australia. Based on the latest APVMA approved product labels, this handy comparison chart is an invaluable quick reference guide to ensure you are using and recommending the most appropriate products in your clinic.



Scan the QR code to access the comparison chart



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