

Slugs and Snails and Puppy-Dogs' Tails

Not just a line from a popular nursery rhyme, but also a warning to dog owners to be aware of an increased threat to their dogs' health posed by a rise in the number of reported cases of a disease, that until recently has been relatively rare, and one that is caught by dogs eating infected slugs and snails.

Canine Angiostrongylosis is a life-threatening disease of dogs caused by a very sophisticated worm. The worm is called *Angiostrongylus vasorum*, often referred to as lungworm or French heartworm due to its discovery in France in 1866.

The worm was first reported in the UK in 1975. Vets across the southern half of the country and in Ireland are now reporting significantly more cases of dogs with the disease than in the past years. As yet it is unclear why there has been an increase, but the worm is known to favour warmer temperatures – something the UK seems to be experiencing lately. Foxes can also be infected, and the increase in urban fox populations might be another reason why vets are seeing more cases in dogs as infected foxes spread worm larvae in their poo.

Infestations of this lungworm often results in death if not diagnosed or left untreated. Early diagnosis by a vet, followed by appropriate treatment should usually lead to a full recovery.

There are many symptoms to watch out for, although an infected dog may equally appear totally healthy. Persistent coughing, reluctance to exercise, depression, weight loss, fits, vomiting, diarrhoea and persistent bleeding from even insignificant cuts are all possible signs. Dogs under the age of two appear to be more susceptible than older dogs even though dogs of all ages and breeds can be affected. The wide range of symptoms can easily be confused with other illnesses so contacting your veterinary practice is important in case any of the above signs have been noticed.

For this lungworm to infect a dog it has to pass through an intermediate host and then be eaten by the dog. In this instance, the intermediate hosts are slugs and snails.

Dogs do not normally willingly eat slugs or snails, although some might unwittingly do so by eating grass or anything else they choose to eat while outside. Outside water bowls or the practice of feeding dogs outside might increase the risk of them eating a slug or snail.

If you suspect your dog may have eaten a slug or a snail, or habitually does so, please book in for a check-up. A simple monthly-applied spot-on, such as Advocate[®], will treat this lungworm and a wide range of other problem parasites, including fleas and roundworms. Just ring and ask for advice!