

Raccoon Roundworm Infection (*Baylisascaris* infection)

1. What is raccoon roundworm (*Baylisascaris*) and what causes it?

Raccoon roundworm infection is caused by the parasite *Baylisascaris procyonis*. This parasite is commonly found in raccoons. This parasite develops into roundworms in the intestines and eggs are shed in raccoon feces (poop). Raccoons often do not show symptoms if they have this infection and can have normal looking feces.

2. Can people or pets get it?

Yes. People and other animals including dogs and cats can become infected by ingesting infectious eggs in the raccoon feces or materials contaminated by raccoon feces, such as soil or water. Parasite eggs become infectious two to four weeks after the feces are deposited. Therefore, fresh raccoon feces cannot transmit the parasite. Children and others who are more likely to put dirt or animal feces in their mouth are more likely to be infected. Raccoon roundworm infection cannot be transmitted person to person.

3. What symptoms do people get?

Raccoon roundworm infection is rare in people, but infections are often severe. In people, the eggs hatch into young (larval) worms in the body and can travel throughout the eyes, brain, and spinal cord. Symptoms in people usually start 1-4 weeks after ingestion of infectious eggs and can include nausea, tiredness, loss of coordination, loss of muscle control, blindness, coma, and death.

4. What symptoms can my pets get?

Raccoon roundworm infection in dogs and cats is rare. Infected dogs may have no symptoms and pass the eggs in their feces or could show signs of muscle spasms, tremors, and progressive weakness. Cats are more likely to show symptoms such as tremors, weakness, and muscle spasms if infected but they cannot shed eggs in their feces.



Key Points:

- Raccoon roundworm infection is caused by the parasite *Baylisascaris procyonis*.
- People and other animals including dogs and cats can become infected by ingesting infectious eggs in the raccoon feces or materials contaminated by raccoon feces, such as soil or water.
- Raccoon roundworm infection is rare in people, but infections are often severe.

For more information:

Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health
<http://ph.lacounty.gov/vet/raccoonroundworm/>

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/raccoonroundworm.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention (CDC)
<https://www.cdc.gov/baylisascaris/about/index.html>

5. How can I protect my pets and family from being infected with *Baylisascaris*?

The best way to avoid infection with *Baylisascaris* is by discouraging raccoons from pooping around your property and to avoid areas that may be contaminated with raccoon feces.

- Do not feed raccoons or keep them as pets.
- Do not feed wildlife and avoid leaving open sources of food outdoors for community cats.
- Feed household pets indoors and never leave pet food or water sources outdoors especially overnight.
- Ask your veterinarian about a regular deworming treatment for your pet that will prevent and treat roundworm infections. Pets should be seen by a veterinarian at least once a year for a checkup.
- Monitor pets when outdoors and keep pets on a leash to prevent access to areas with raccoon feces.
- Promptly remove and discard your pet's feces. Do not let animal feces pile up in your yard. Wash your hands with soap and water after.
- Close pet doors at night. Keep children and pets away from areas where raccoons poop. Do not handle raccoon feces and ensure that your child does not handle or ingest any sand or dirt that may be contaminated with raccoon feces.
- Always wash hands with soap and water after being outside and after touching pets or picking up pet waste.
- Pick up and discard food sources around homes such as fruit that has fallen from trees. Close off access to basements, attics, and crawl spaces. Clear brush and trees away from your property and roof line to discourage raccoons from sleeping or defecating nearby.
- Keep all trash in tightly closed containers.
- Cover all sandboxes when not in use, as raccoons may defecate in sandboxes.
- Be aware that raccoons and other wildlife may also be attracted to fishponds and bird feeders.

6. Who should I contact if I or my pets may have been infected with *Baylisascaris*?

For infections in humans, contact your physician immediately. For infections in animals, contact your veterinarian.

7. What if there is raccoon feces on my property?

Raccoon feces should be removed promptly when found. Raccoon feces that are still fresh are not infective for raccoon roundworm (it takes 2-4 weeks for the parasite eggs to become infective). Therefore, if feces are removed promptly, any concern about raccoon roundworm is greatly decreased.

- Avoid contaminating hands and clothes. Wear disposable gloves, rubber boots that can be scrubbed, or cover your shoes with disposable booties that can be thrown away. Wear a well-fitting N95-rated respirator.
- If the feces are dry, avoid creating fecal dust. Spray a small amount of water or place damp paper towels over the feces.
- Pick up the raccoon feces using a shovel or inverted plastic bag. Double bag them, seal tightly and then discard in a closed outdoor trash bin.
- Clean off any remaining visible feces from location or tools with detergent and water.
- Finally, decontaminate hard smooth surfaces (including shovels) by applying boiling water or by using a steam cleaner. Note that most chemicals do not kill raccoon roundworm eggs, but high heat kills them instantly.
- Remove and discard gloves. Wash clothing in high heat and detergent. Wash hands with soap and water.
- Some latrines may be in places that are difficult or unsafe to clean. In those cases, hiring a private company to remove the latrine and clean the area may be necessary.