

### Parasite Overview Internal & External

#### **Fleas**

Fleas are bloodsucking parasites and, as with ringworm, a flea infestation is a nuisance in a single animal but can be devastating in a shelter. On a mature cat, fleas are not particularly serious, but young kittens do not have that much blood and they are virtually defenseless; they do not groom themselves yet, so they are not scratching. Young kittens can easily get anemia from a flea infestation, which can be life-threatening.

- Flea treatments that are meant for older cats can kill a kitten, so if you find fleas or flea dirt on kittens of any age, alert nursery management so the correct treatment can be administered.
- Over-the-counter flea treatments are not used in the nursery because they are not effective and are much more toxic than what our veterinarians use.

#### **Ticks**

We rarely see ticks on our kittens or mother cats. If you think you see ticks, alert nursery management for further evaluation and treatment.

#### **Ear Mites**

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal. If you see a dark brown discharge (which can look like dirt or coffee grounds) in a kitten's ears, it is probably ear mites.

- If you see dirt in a kitten's ears, alert nursery management so it can be evaluated and treated.
- Do not clean a kitten's ears without first checking with nursery management. A kitten's ear canal can easily be damaged by the improper use of cotton swabs.
- Ear mites can be passed from one kitten to another, and transmission usually requires direct contact.

#### **Roundworms, Tapeworms, and Hookworms**

Worms affect a cat's digestive system and are very common in kittens. You can sometimes see worms in or around a kitten's rectum; you may see a long worm or what looks like rice protruding from its anus. Indications of worms are a large belly, diarrhea, and an inability to gain weight even when eating well. If you see signs of worms, alert nursery management. There are various medications given to the kitten, depending on the type of worm, that easily take care of the problem. Worms can be passed through the feces to other animals.

#### **Coccidia and Giardia**

Coccidia and Giardia are very common. They are protozoa that invade a kitten's digestive system and cause diarrhea. These are highly transmissible and can be spread through feces. These parasites are easily treated with oral medications.

Parasites can cause digestive problems as well as diarrhea for the kitten. Diarrhea can be dangerous for a kitten and should be treated as soon as it shows up. Not all diarrhea is related to illness or infection—sometimes it can be a result of a change in diet—but all diarrhea should be reported to the Nursery Manager for evaluation.