

I had my dog's stool sample tested by my veterinarian and the results showed she had a parasite from a rabbit but we didn't need to treat it. I am concerned and wanted to get more information.

Unfortunately, many dogs enjoy eating rabbit droppings they find in the yard. While disgusting to most of us, this habit is fortunately not associated too often with disease that could affect your dog. There is a type of rabbit tapeworm that can infect a dog, but the dog would have to eat the rabbit, not just its stool. Other worms are not passed from rabbits to dogs.

Besides intestinal worms, there are microscopic single celled-parasites that are a problem for many species of animals. Coccidia are one type that have particular species that infect specific animals. While the type of coccidia known as Isospora can cause disease in dogs and other carnivores, another type, Eimeria cause problems in deer, rabbits and other herbivorous animals. If a dog or cat, particularly a puppy or kitten, picks up Isospora cysts from a dirty environment or from stool of an infected animal, serious diarrhea can result due to the organisms invading their intestinal cells and destroying them. However, if your dog ate rabbit stool that contained Eimeria cysts, those would not cause any damage to the dog, they simply pass through the intestines and can be seen microscopically as they appear in the dog's feces. My guess is that your dog's stool specimen contained microscopic Eimeria cysts.

Parasites that potentially could be transmitted from rabbits to dogs via ingesting their droppings are Cryptosporidia and Giardia. These organisms can damage your dog's digestive system and result in illness, although they can be found in dogs and cats without any clinical signs of disease. The cysts can also be transmitted to humans from animal feces and are particularly dangerous if the person has a weakened immune system.

Giardia is easily transmitted by ingesting contaminated droppings or water. These microscopic parasites can infect multiple species, including humans. It is possible to be infected without any symptoms, but in other cases diarrhea and weight loss may occur and treatment should be prescribed to get rid of the parasites.

Francine K. Rattner, V.M.D.

South Arundel Veterinary Hospital