



RACCOON ROUNDWORM *Baylisascaris procyonis*

(is increasingly being recognized as a human health concern)

- **Raccoon roundworm is an extremely common intestinal parasite found primarily in raccoons.** In some raccoon populations, the infection rate can be as high as 80% (Gompper et al, 2005).
- **Raccoons are the natural host of this parasite.** Adult roundworms measure 15 to 20cm (6-8 inches), but the eggs are microscopic and cannot be seen with the naked eye. Since raccoons display no common behavioral changes when infected, roundworm infection can only be confirmed through internal examination or microscopic inspection of feces.
- **Eggs shed through feces become viable after only a couple of weeks.** They can remain viable for years and survive several winters and extreme drought conditions.
- **Adult raccoons infected with raccoon roundworm shed millions of eggs in their feces every day.** It is this high rate of egg production that facilitates the spread of the parasite through grooming activities and general den site contamination.
- **Humans can become exposed to the eggs by handling live traps, attic insulation, soil or other items contaminated with feces, or through contact with live raccoons and carcasses.**
- **Humans are not a natural host, and migrating roundworms can cause extreme tissue damage** (to the central nervous system, spinal cord, organs, optic nerves and brain), as the larva migrate out of the intestines in search of a more suitable environment.
- **This kind of infection in people can lead to blindness, neurological damage and even death (Stephenson, 2002).** It can cause a severe, frequently fatal infection in humans, and no effective therapy or vaccine exists. To date, no human case of neurological damage caused by raccoon roundworm has been successfully treated (Wise et al, 2005). Since 1985, there have been over 100 cases of severe raccoon roundworm infection in humans, and 15 deaths (Globe and Mail, 2005).
- **The Great Lakes Saint Lawrence Basin is home to some of North America's highest raccoon populations,** therefore avoiding raccoons altogether is very difficult. Preventing raccoons from denning and breeding on your property is the first step in reducing your risk.
- **Promptly and safely removing feces** from rooftops, attics, crawlspaces, garage decks, sandboxes, flowerbeds and other commonly used latrine or denning areas is vital to reducing the risk of exposure in humans. Special attention should be paid to residential watershed areas such as eaves troughs, that may carry contaminated feces off the roof and into a garden, lawn, driveway, or other play areas.



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