

Larva Migrans

What is larva migrans and what causes it?

Larva migrans describes a parasitic disease involving migration of immature (larval) worms in various parts of the body. Several different worm species can be involved and migration occurs in one of three forms.

When the worms migrate through the skin of the host, it is called **cutaneous (skin) larva migrans**. If the worm larvae migrate through various internal organs of the host, it is called **visceral larva migrans**. Sometimes the worm larvae may invade the eye of the host. This is called **ocular (eye) larva migrans**. Humans and a wide range of animal species can be affected by this disease.

What animals get larva migrans?

Larval migrans has been seen in dogs, pigs, rabbits, lambs, cattle, non-human primates, domestic and wild fowl, sea otters and other species.

How can my animal get larva migrans?

Animals can get worm larvae from their mothers before birth, while nursing, from ingesting the worm eggs (**oral**) from feces in the environment or by eating other infested animals (e.g., cats eating rodents).

How does larva migrans affect my animal?

Most animals with larva migrans show no signs of illness. Young animals may have diarrhea and possibly die if the number of worms present is large. Some worm species, can migrate to the brain and spinal cord (visceral larva migrans) and cause

incoordination, trembling and circling in the affected animal. Many times this is fatal.

Can I get larva migrans?

Yes. Humans can get infested by various worm species after (accidentally) ingesting the parasite eggs (**oral**) or by eating tissues from an infested animal and by penetration (**direct contact**) of the worm larvae through the skin.

Animal hookworms are the most common cause of cutaneous larva migrans while roundworms common to dogs and cats are the most important causes of visceral and ocular larva migrans in humans.

Cutaneous larva migrans will appear as raised, reddened "tracts" or lines in the affected area, commonly the foot or arms. Signs of visceral larva migrans will vary depending on the organ infested. Ocular larva migrans will result in vision problems and can lead to blindness.

Who should I contact, if I suspect larva migrans?

In Animals –

Contact your veterinarian.

In Humans –

Contact your physician.

How can I protect my animal from larva migrans?

Dogs and cats, especially puppies and kittens, should be dewormed regularly. Feces from pets should be cleaned up and disposed of on a regular basis. Keep animals away from any areas (yards, sandboxes, gardens) that may contain feces from other animals, including wildlife. Don't allow your pet to eat feces from other animals.

How can I protect myself from larva migrans?

Good hygiene and regular deworming of pets will reduce the chance of human exposure. Children should not play in areas possibly contaminated with animal feces. Keep play areas, lawns and gardens around your home free of animal waste by disposing of pet feces regularly and covering sandboxes when not in use. Always wash your hands after handling soil or touching animals.

For More Information

CFSPH Technical Fact Sheets. Larva Migrans at <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/DiseaseInfo/>

CDC website. Guidelines for Veterinarians: Prevention of Zoonotic Transmission of Ascarids and Hookworms of Dogs and Cats at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/ascaris/prevention.htm>

