

NEMATODES OF THE TOXOCARA GENUS – ANIMAL PARASITES DANGEROUS FOR HUMANS

Summary

Nematodes of the *Toxocara* genus are common parasites of alimentary tracts of carnivorous animals (dogs, cats). *Toxocara* spp. infection was detected in 72% of puppies from shelters and 10.5–30% of homeless cats. It is not surprising to find that many of the soil samples from city parks, streets and other public places are contaminated with canine nematode eggs. The eggs of *Toxocara* spp. can survive in the soil for even 10 years. Pollution of the natural environment (soil) with the eggs of *Toxocara* spp. in Poland has been examined several times. For example *Toxocara* eggs were detected in 11.8% soil samples from yards in Warsaw, 17.9% in Bytom, 27% in Poznań and 61.9% in Cracow.

Toxocarosis is a zoonosis caused by *Toxocara canis* and *Toxocara cati*. Researchers distinguish

five forms of toxocarosis: visceral toxocarosis, ocular toxocarosis, neurotoxocarosis, covert toxocarosis and unsymptomatic toxocarosis. Clinical manifestation of toxocarosis depends on the number of larvae ingested and frequency of infection, distribution of larvae in the body and intensity of the host's immunological response. Most frequently infections are characteristic to children due to a lower immunological response than in adults, no admonition of hygiene rules, repeated contacts with animals and specific behaviour (geophagia). Recognition of toxocarosis is still very problematic for clinicians. Correct and rapid diagnosis is very important in the fight against toxocarosis.