

## **Dog Fouling & The Law**

The Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996 allows authorities to designate public areas as places where dog owners must clean up after their pets. Hanna's Field playing fields and Chase are designated areas and there are warnings to pet owners around the area, free poop scoop bags are provided at the Hall and Village Shop, and bins are provided for safe disposal of faeces around the Hall and Chase. Although the law is complied with by most dog owners using the field unfortunately there is still a significant minority ignoring the law.

The reality is that *Toxocara Canis* (the round worm carried by dogs) is a serious problem in our public parks and gardens. The statistics indicate that 54% of dog owners have never bought or used worming tablets! Random soil sampling in this country shows the majority of public parks and playing fields are contaminated with *Toxocara* eggs in various stages of development and it is therefore not surprising that the majority of *Toxocara* infections in this country arise from parks and play areas. Unfortunately the eggs are resistant to freezing and disinfectants and can survive for two years or more in the ground. The eggs are not infectious until two to three weeks after being deposited so it's the unsuspecting child or football player who is at risk. A single dog-poo can contain approximately 1 million microscopic eggs.

Human Toxocariasis is a potentially serious infection. The number of human infections is estimated at 2% of adults. Eye disorders are the most commonly reported symptoms associated with Toxocariasis due to transportation of larvae via the retinal artery to the eye, causing blindness and eye disorders. The link to flu like symptoms, such as aches, nausea and dizziness, and asthma and epileptic fits may go unrecognized and unreported. Half of all diagnosed cases involve serious eye damage. Nearly all are children who contracted the disease as toddlers. Frequently the contact is through hands and once swallowed the disease can last 6 to 24 months.

What can we do about people who do not clean up after their pets? Incredible as it may seem there is one man who regularly takes his dog and young children into the fenced off Children's Play Area. We need to change the attitudes of those few who ignore the law – it's simply not acceptable to leave dog-poo on the playing fields. If we can't change attitudes we may have to stop access to the field for all dog owners – we hope it doesn't come to that but can we continue to risk a child's sight because some ignore the law?

What else can we do – well all dog owners should ensure their dogs are regularly wormed to minimize the risk of spreading the infection to humans and other dogs. Secondly the most effective measure against those who ignore the signs is sometimes shame – point out the offence and danger if you see somebody doing it. Thirdly you can report the person and details to Chelmsford Borough Council dog warden's office. The offence for allowing a dog to foul public land is £1,000. Lastly the Charity has asked the Dog Warden to mount patrols to catch offenders.