



### ***Baylisascaris* (raccoon roundworm)**

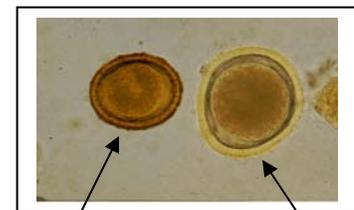
**Background:** *Baylisascaris procyonis*, also known as the raccoon roundworm, is a parasite that is commonly found in raccoons in most parts of the US except the southern-most states. The range of the parasite has expanded in recent years, with illegal translocation of wild raccoons suspected of playing an important role in its spread. The parasite was considered to be absent or rare in Florida raccoons until recent years when *Baylisascaris* infections were identified in wild raccoons in various parts of the state.



**Animal Health:** Raccoons are the primary or definitive host and shed eggs in large quantities in their feces. Heavily infected juvenile raccoons can develop some signs of illness, but many do not appear obviously ill, and infected adults rarely show any signs of disease. Dogs that ingest raccoon feces can become infected and go on to shed eggs in their feces. Exotic pets that are closely related to raccoons but not native to Florida such as kinkajous and coati (coatimundi) may also be infected and shed eggs. These exotic animals may be infected in their country of origin or in the US. Imported animals are not routinely screened for parasites upon entry into the US. Rodents, rabbits and some birds can develop parasite cysts in their organs and infect animals that eat them, but do not shed eggs in their feces. Skunks may be infected with a similar type of roundworm.

**Human Health:** Feces from infected animals are not immediately infectious to people. Fecal material that is left in the environment for more than 11 days may be infectious. The eggs can survive for years in the environment and are resistant to most disinfectants. However, eggs can be inactivated with heating (>144°F, scalding water, or steam). People who accidentally swallow material contaminated with eggs (fecal-oral exposure), can be infected. Young children are particularly at risk. Infections in people can result in parasite cyst formation in the brain, eye or other organs. Severe infections are dose dependent and relatively uncommon, but have resulted in deaths. Symptoms may include fever, nausea, unusual tiredness, loss of coordination, inability to focus attention, loss of muscle control, muscle aches or pain, vision impairment, and respiratory signs. Testing for suspected human cases is available through the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

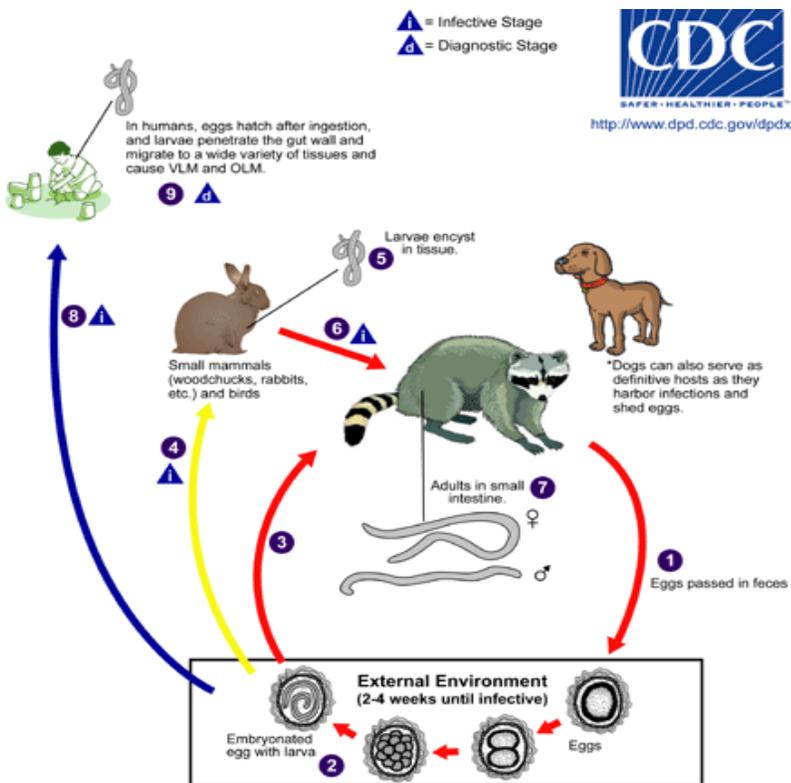
**Diagnosis:** Regular parasite screens at a veterinary clinic using a simple fecal flotation test will identify the parasite. Young animals or animals that have received partial de-worming treatment might require serial parasite tests. The raccoon roundworm egg is slightly smaller than the dog roundworm egg (*Toxocara*). Your veterinarian should be able to distinguish the two using a special microscope measuring tool (micrometer).



*Baylisascaris*  
63-75  $\mu$

*Toxocara*  
85-90  $\mu$

**Infection Prevention Measures:** Always use good hygiene including good hand washing when handling animals, animal waste, or material contaminated with animal waste. All pets should be taken for regular veterinary visits and have routine parasite screens and de-worming treatments, particularly young animals, those new to the home, pets who spend time outside, or those held in close proximity to animal species that could be infected with the parasite. Infected animals should be de-wormed and have follow-up testing for parasites. Feces from infected animals should be disposed of properly to prevent exposure to people and other animals. Environmental decontamination of porous surfaces can be achieved using steam cleaning. Contaminated soil is difficult to disinfect and therefore rapid removal of feces and using pans under animal pens to prevent soil contamination is strongly recommended in combination with a good parasite prevention program. Persons who may have been exposed to the parasite should consult with their health care provider. Wild animals and exotic pets may be at greater risk for harboring other diseases infectious to people such as rabies.



**For more information see:**

CDC *Baylisascaris* Infection: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/baylisascaris/index.html>

CDC *Baylisascaris* in pools:

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/pools/animals/raccoons-and-pools.html>

FL DOH Diseases Infectious from Animals to People (Zoonotic Diseases):

<http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/medicine/arboviral/Zoonoses/Zoonotic-index.html>