Hydatid disease - A dangerous rural hazard

P. M. A. Harwood
HYDATID DISEASE
A Dangerous Rural Hazard

By P. M. A. HARWOOD, M.R.C.V.S., Senior Veterinary Surgeon

UNLESS precautions are taken, farm dogs may be the source of a dangerous and sometimes fatal human disease. Children in particular are very susceptible and the effects may cause a lifetime of ill-health. Dogs, which are infested with Hydatid tapeworms, pass the eggs in their droppings. These eggs are the source of human infections.

Dogs pick up the tapeworms from eating raw offal containing the Hydatid cysts. These cysts are particularly prevalent in sheep offal, but may also be found in cattle, pig and kangaroo offal.

The cysts contain hundreds of minute tapeworms waiting to attach themselves to the dog or fox which eats them.

Sheep develop cysts after grazing areas contaminated by infected dog or fox droppings.

Cysts may develop up to more than 6in. in diameter and in the sheep are usually found in the lungs and liver. Although relatively harmless to the sheep, these cysts can also develop in the organs of human beings, where the effects are most serious.

Humans pick up eggs from two main sources. Dog droppings eventually dry to dust and this dust may contain living eggs. Unwashed lettuce grown on farms may be contaminated with this dust. But the greatest danger is to children who play with dogs and then eat or lick their fingers without washing their hands. Dogs often have tapeworm eggs adhering to their coats and are a potent source of infection.

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE AGAINST HYDATID DISEASE
Prevention depends on three main principles.

1. Never give dogs raw offal of any description.
   As stated previously, one living cyst may contain hundreds of tapeworms. Raw offal such as heart, lights and liver is made absolutely safe by boiling for ten minutes.

2. Treat dogs regularly for tapeworms.
The treatment of choice is with Arecolline hydrobromide and is carried out as follows:
   (a) The dog is starved for 12 to 18 hours.
   (b) Arecoline hydrobromide is given by mouth in tablet form or dissolved in a small quantity of water.
   Dose Rate—

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<tr>
<th>Dogs of terrier size</th>
<th>Dogs of sheepdog size</th>
<th>Kangaroo dogs</th>
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<td>½</td>
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NB.—Although Arecoline hydrobromide is very violent in its effects, resulting in severe purging, it is a very safe drug and is far more effective against Hydatid tapeworms than other and less violent tapeworm medicines.

Worming should be carried out at least every six months.

3. Always wash your hands after handling dogs and impress the importance of this practice on your children.

4. Always wash salad vegetables grown on farms where sheep are raised.
Diagram showing the life cycle of the dog tapeworm, with recommended control measures for hydatid disease.

Note.—Town dogs do not have much opportunity of picking up Hydatid worms. All meat and offal at abattoirs is inspected and any organs containing Hydatid cysts are condemned. The risk of this disease occurs where sheep are raised.

SUMMARY
1. Hydatid disease is a serious and sometimes fatal disease affecting humans.
2. The disease is transmitted by dogs.
3. Dogs are infected by eating raw offal containing cysts.
4. Offal fed to farm dogs MUST be boiled.
5. Always wash your hands after handling dogs and impress the importance of this on your children.
6. Worm the dogs regularly with Arecoline hydrobromide.
7. Wash salad vegetables.