

To Whom it Should Concern,

I am a local small animal veterinarian, as well as a soccer and referee parent, and have been asked to write a letter about why parents and spectators should not be breaking the law and bringing their dogs onto soccer fields. It seems odd that I should need to tell anyone why they shouldn't break the law. At my children's games I regularly see dogs on the fields, lots of dogs. Off and on leash. Puppies and geriatrics. Regardless of whether the dog is on a leash or not, it is illegal, under SMC 18.12.080, to have dogs on athletic fields. Why? It isn't only because of potential bites. It's because many dogs, and ALL PUPPIES, carry intestinal parasites. This includes dogs that have annual "negative" fecal examinations. Roundworms, intestinal parasites that are found in many dogs can shed eggs into dog feces in large volumes. Even if the dog owner picks up the feces, any time a dog defecates some of the fecal matter, which could include roundworm eggs, is left behind on the ground. These eggs and the larvae they become can survive on that soccer field ground for months.

When our children play soccer they fall down, sit on the ground, and pick up the ball that has been all over the ground. In other words, if a dog with roundworms defecated on the field months ago any child on the field could easily come in contact with roundworm larvae. If that child were to ingest the larvae (snacks after games...and Purel won't help here) the larvae would then migrate out of the child's intestines and through their body. In humans this is known as visceral and/or ocular larval migrans. This migration through human's liver, other abdominal organs, lungs, brain, and/or eye causes permanent damage, including blindness, and sometimes death. Annual fecal examinations for parasite eggs are an inadequate method of determining whether or not dogs have parasites. All a fecal exam tells you is your dog didn't pass any worm eggs in that particular stool sample. Even dogs that are on monthly dewormers can't be guaranteed to be parasite free. This is why dogs shouldn't be on playing fields.

Why have you never heard of this? The main reason is this is thankfully a rare occurrence. Other reasons include that MD's and Veterinarians aren't doing the best job of educating the public. Also, this isn't a reportable disease so no data is collected about the prevalence. Unless the press gets a hold of the news of a case no one hears about it. Luckily the Northwest has a low parasite load, but I do regularly diagnose roundworms in my canine patients. Am I over reacting? Probably. Is it worth it if we save one child from chronic liver disease or blindness? Yes. If you want to read up on this further please go to the Companion Animal Parasite Council's two websites. The lay person site is www.petsandparasited.org and the Veterinarian site is www.capcvet.org.

The law prohibiting dogs from athletic fields is a valid law. Ignorance is not an excuse. I am aware that others who are not associated with soccer take their dogs on fields. Hardly an excuse either. It's time we took our children's safety seriously. Parents need to leave the dogs at home; coaches need to enforce this law. Perhaps if referees started red carding coaches for allowing a parent on their team to break the law/endanger the health and safety of the players we might get people's attention? Please let me know if you have any questions,

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