What are tapeworms?
Tapeworms are a long and flat (sometimes several feet!) zoonotic parasite, made up of many segments and live in the small intestines of dogs, cats, domestic animals and wildlife. A parasite is a living organism that lives upon or within another living organism at whose expense it obtains nutrients and shelter. Zoonotic parasites can be transmitted from pets to humans. Tapeworms do not have a mouth, and instead hold onto the inside of the intestine with suckers. Some also have hooks that strengthen their attachment.

Who in the family is at risk?
Outdoor pets, pets with fleas or pets around infected animals are at risk of becoming infected with tapeworms. There is one species of tapeworm in dogs that can be transmitted to people resulting in serious disease. Children run a higher risk of coming in contact with a zoonotic parasite due to their play habits, attraction to pets and pica (dirt eating).

How does infection occur?
Pets are commonly infected with tapeworms through the ingestion of fleas in the process of normal grooming, licking or chewing. Pets can ingest the eggs or larvae directly, through coprophagia (eating of fecal waste), or by eating rodents or other animals. Humans get the disease from ingesting tapeworm eggs from infected fecal material.

How do I know if my pet is infected?
Most commonly, owners will notice tapeworm segments (pieces of the worm passed as the worm grows in the intestines) around the anal area or on the surface of stool. The segments may be moving or may appear as grains of rice caught in the hair around the rectum. They may also be found in places where infected pets rest and sleep. By performing fecal exams twice yearly, your Banfield medical team may also detect tapeworm eggs before you see any symptoms at home. Some pets, especially kittens or puppies, do become noticeably ill and symptoms can include:

- Diarrhea
- Intestinal impaction
- Visible segments

How are they treated?
Tapeworms are treated with an injection, topical or oral medications. Treatment may need to be repeated and reinfection with tapeworms can occur any time a pet has fleas. Common over the counter de-wormers are not always effective in treating tapeworms.

What can you do to protect the entire family?
- Schedule twice yearly exams and fecal exams for your pet
- Practice good, year-round, consistent flea control that is recommended by your Banfield medical team
- Quickly clean up after your pets to remove potentially infective eggs from your environment before weather, insects, or active migration of the larvae allows them to spread
- Discourage children from eating soil
- Cover sand boxes when not in use, and avoid possibly contaminated areas
- Practice good hygiene for both your family and pet

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.