

WHAT IS GIARDIA?

Giardia is an intestinal parasite that affects dogs, particularly puppies, and cats. Diarrhea is the most common sign of Giardia. The diarrhea is characterized by a soft, frothy, or mucous appearance. A rancid odor to the feces is often noted. Usually, the diarrhea subsides on its own and the pet is able to make a full recovery. **Most pets do not become seriously ill from Giardia, so the prognosis is almost always good.** However, in more severe cases or pets with a compromised immune system, weight loss, malabsorption, general lethargy, and/or serious infections may occur. Some patients show no symptoms at all.

WHERE DOES GIARDIA COME FROM?

Giardia comes from contaminated water sources, such as water from a well. Many dogs pick it up from puddles in high traffic areas such as dog parks, kennels, boarding, and licking fur that has come in contact with infected feces.

HOW IS GIARDIA DETECTED?

The infection is diagnosed by obtaining a fecal sample and examining it under a microscope or by using a direct smear, fecal flotation, Giardia-specific ELISA test, or a PCR test.

HOW IS GIARDIA TREATED?

Several different drugs can be used to eliminate the parasite. These include metronidazole, fenbendazole, or a combination of multiple dewormers. The choice of drug, the dose, and the length of treatment will depend on the severity of the infection, the reproductive status of the animal, etc. The use of probiotics and fiber can also be used to help increase the effectiveness of some of these drugs such as metronidazole. Extra fiber in your pet's diet may help with recurrent cases. Your veterinarian will decide which is best for your pet.

Because cysts can stick to the fur of the infected patient, becoming a source of potential re-infection, the positive animal should receive a bath at least once during the course of treatment. Bagging and removing contaminated feces daily is necessary to prevent recurrence of disease. Some strains of Giardia are resistant to certain treatments. A stool sample should be checked after treatment.

ENVIRONMENTAL DECONTAMINATION

The best disinfectant is bleach diluted 1:32 in water. In one study, the solution required less than one minute of contact to kill Giardia cysts! Animals should be bathed before being reintroduced into a "clean" area. Decontaminating areas with grass or plants will not be possible without killing the plants due to the need for bleach to be applied. Minimizing standing water and maximizing direct sunlight will help to decrease the incidents of giardia. Lastly, good hygiene, such as washing one's hands, is extremely important in this situation.

CAN PEOPLE OR OTHER PETS BECOME INFECTED?

Each species (humans vs animals) has their own strands of Giardia. In North America, there is currently no conclusive evidence of human infection originating from dogs or cats. Canine strains of Giardia are typically not a threat to healthy individuals. However, those with underlying health conditions should exercise caution when exposed to Giardia-infected pets. It's advisable for clients to seek medical attention if they experience gastrointestinal symptoms after contact with an infected pet. It's important to note that if both humans and pets within the same household are infected, it doesn't necessarily indicate transmission between them. To minimize risk, individuals should wash their hands after using the toilet and before interacting with animals.

HOW DO WE KNOW THE INFECTION HAS BEEN ELIMINATED?

A follow-up stool test should be performed after treatment and 6 months after the follow-up test. We recommend that pets should be tested bi-annually.



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