

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GIARDIA

What is Giardia?

Giardia is a microscopic, protozoan parasite that causes inflammation of the intestinal tract and subsequent diarrhea that can be very serious. It has been referred to as backpackers' disease because of the risk of exposure when hiking.

How does it spread?

Giardia is transmitted by oral ingestion of water or food that has been contaminated by stools of infected people and animals.

Infection occurs commonly from drinking water in ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. Even mountain spring water sources may be contaminated. Avoid drinking water from these sources and do not allow your pet to drink from them either. When you go hiking, always carry fresh water.

What are the signs of Giardia?

Acute infection after exposure can last from 1-2 weeks. The clinical signs of Giardia in animals may include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Greasy stools that tend to float
- Stomach or abdominal cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea/vomiting
- Dehydration (loss of fluids) and weight loss

How is Giardia diagnosed?

- **Fecal floatation:** Fecal floatation for cysts is ore diagnostic, but the trophozoite stage won't be seen by floatation- the floatation solution destroys the trophozoites.
- **ELISA and IFA assays:** Assays for Giardia antigens in feces are the most diagnostic test we have available.
- **Smear:** Sometimes the immature trophozoites can be seen in a smear of the feces under a microscope. Because they are only passed intermittently, even in symptomatic dogs, multiple smears over time must be done; still, they may fail to reveal the parasites.

All dogs with clinical signs of Giardia should be tested.

How is Giardia treated?

Effective treatment involves metronidazole (antibiotic / antiprotozoal) in and may be used in combination with a drug called fenbendazole (dewormer). Following appropriate treatment, infected animals should be retested for response.

Home Care and Prevention

Administer as directed all medications prescribed by your veterinarian. All of the prescribed medication should be given to ensure elimination of the infection. A high-fiber diet may improve stool consistency in pets with diarrhea associated with Giardia.

Decontamination of the environment is an important part of preventing infections. In multiple dog households and in situations in which animals are under close confinement (i.e. kennels, animal shelters), proper sanitation is crucial to prevent cross-contamination from one animal to another. All fecal material must be removed from cages, runs and yards. Kennels must be cleaned with appropriate disinfectants and totally dried before allowing pets to access them. It is also recommended to purchase cleaning wipes (baby wipes work well) to clean the perianal area after your pet defecates. If he or she walks in the stool the feet should be clean throughly.