



*Protecting and enhancing the lives of lost,  
unwanted and homeless animals.*

## **Giardia**

### **General Information**

Giardia is a single celled organism that is commonly found in the intestines of many animals. The tiny parasite clings to the intestinal surface or floats in the mucous lining. Some dogs and cats may carry the organism but will not show any signs of the disease. Others will show significant symptoms that could lead to death in certain animals.

There are two forms of Giardia: A swimming stage that lives in the intestine, and a non swimming cyst stage that passes in the feces. The encystment occurs when the parasite moves from the small intestine to the large intestine. These cysts can be quite resistant and can survive for several months outside of the animal if there is moisture present. Animals become infected when they ingest these cysts which break open in the intestine and release the motile feeding stage. The giardia organism reproduces by cell division.

For dogs the species is called *Giardia canis*, for cats, *Giardia cati*. It is thought that each species can infect more than one host.

Giardia is considered to be zoonotic, it can be passed from animal to animal and from animal to human. In humans, a giardia infection causes diarrhea, gas, cramps, upset stomach, weight loss and dehydration. Some people with giardiasis have no symptoms, but normally symptoms begin 1-2 weeks after infection. (It is inconclusive as to whether the species of Giardia that affects dogs, cats and man are the same)

### **Recognition of disease**

Most infections are asymptomatic. It is most common in younger animals.

- Diarrhea: can be acute, intermittent or chronic
- Straining and mucus in feces
- Flatulence
- Dehydration
- Loss of weight: animals may not lose their appetite, but lose weight.

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- Abnormal feces: pale, bad odor, greasy. Giardia prevents the absorption of nutrients and damages the intestinal lining which interferes with digestion.

## **Prevention**

There are several ways that an animal or human can become infected with Giardia:

- putting a hand or object that has come in contact with the feces of an infected animal in the mouth
- drinking water that is contaminated with Giardia, which could include water from lakes, rivers, ponds, streams (cysts can survive in cold water for several months)
- eating raw food contaminated with Giardia

Therefore, prevention of Giardia, for both humans and animals includes

1. Washing hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling animals, animal feces, dishes, toys etc.
2. All visitors should be encouraged to wash their hands before and after visiting the animals
3. Wash hands before handling or eating food
4. Pick up feces as soon as they are deposited
5. Do not allow the dogs to drink water from lakes, rivers, ponds and streams
6. Clean floors, bedding, dishes and toys on a regular basis, particularly where feces have been deposited

## **General Policy**

Giardia in the shelter is considered a treatable condition. Animals with giardia will be treated in the shelter environment.

## **Initial Response**

### *Animal Placement*

The animal must be placed in isolation immediately and transport the animal and fresh stool samples to the veterinarian as soon as possible. Several fecal tests may need to be done as the cysts may not show up on certain tests.

### Treatment

Once identified as Giardia, proceed with the medication that is prescribed by the veterinarian. It is essential that all the feces are removed as soon as possible. The kennel space needs to be cleaned thoroughly each day.

### Cleaning

Controlling Giardia can be a big problem for kennels and catteries. There is a recommended four pronged approach.

1. Treat the animal (as above)
2. Decontaminate the Environment: Keep the area clean, remove all fecal material (organic matter in feces can decrease the effectiveness of many disinfectants). Steam clean the area and clean it with Quatsly-D/quaternary ammonium. Bleach is also effective. Keep the environment dry as well.
3. Clean the animals: Cysts can remain stuck to the coats of animals that are affected. Before removing the animal to a clean area, shampoo and rinse them well (concentrate on the perianal area). Be sure all shampoo has been removed from the animal (it can neutralize the effect of Quaternary ammonium).
4. Prevent Reintroduction of Giardia: It can be brought into the kennel or cattery by introducing an infected animal or on your footwear. Any new animal should be in isolation from the others and treated and cleaned as above. Use disposable shoe covers or footbaths with quaternary ammonium compounds to prevent people from reintroducing Giardia.

### Public Safety

It is essential that a sign stating that Giardia exists in the shelter. Signs are to be posted both at the front of the shelter and at the area in which the affected animal is being housed.

Giardia may infect people so it is essential that people are washing their hands, having protective covering and disposing of feces in a proper way.

### **Monitoring and Recovery**

It is important that all cleaning procedures are followed so that the animal does not get reinfected. The animal will need a healthy food, rest and attention as they may feel lethargic from chronic diarrhea.