



Giardia: A Client Handout

Pets are members of the family and it is our pleasure and honor to treat your family member. This handout is intended to educate pet parents on Giardia and some of the terms and treatments that accompany this diagnosis.

What is Giardia?

Giardia is a microscopic parasite that lives in the intestines of many domestic and wild animals. The parasite is shed in the feces and can survive in moist areas, particularly stagnant water and animal waste. If people or animals ingest contaminated water or food, or touch and accidentally ingest infected animal waste, they may contract Giardia and develop a serious intestinal infection. Your pets can also get infected from licking their paws after walking on contaminated areas or from direct contact with infected animals.

What are the symptoms of Giardia?

Giardia attaches to the intestinal lining, damaging the tissue and interfering with the host's ability to absorb nutrients. If your pet is infected, he or she may exhibit one or more of the following signs:

- Diarrhea
- Depression
- Weight loss
- Decreased appetite
- Vomiting
- Flatulence
- Greasy stools

If Giardia parasites remain in the host for a long time, they erode the intestinal lining and can cause sporadic bloody diarrhea. Left untreated, your pet may become increasingly debilitated and susceptible to other intestinal infections.

If your pet shows any of these symptoms, make an appointment with your veterinarian right away, and if possible, bring a small, fresh stool sample so the medical team can test the feces for the parasite.

How will the doctor test for Giardia?

Our veterinary medical team will perform a SNAP[®] Giardia test on a fresh fecal sample from your pet as well as perform a microscopic fecal examination to detect the presence of Giardia or other parasites.

What is the treatment for Giardia?

Typically Giardia is resolved with a course of a broad spectrum anti-biotic and a dewormer. If the diarrhea and vomiting are severe, a special diet, anti-diarrheal and anti-nausea drugs may be prescribed.

Giardia can rob your pet of specific nutrients, so vitamin supplementation may also be necessary. Because cross-contamination is common and some pets do not show clinical signs, all pets in your household may need treatment. Unfortunately, recurrent infections are common so it's important to monitor your pet's condition and call your veterinarian if symptoms do not improve or if they worsen.

Is my family at risk of contracting Giardia?

There are several species of Giardia and a very small amount of evidence leads to humans sharing the same species of Giardia as dogs and cats. People are susceptible to contracting some species of Giardia, however; it is more likely to be contracted by drinking from a contaminated water source than from your pet. It is still important to follow the preventative measures listed below to reduce your risk of becoming infected with Giardia. If you or your family members show any of the symptoms listed above, schedule an appointment with your health care professionals as soon as possible.

How can Giardia be prevented?

Cleaning your pet's environment is an extremely important part of eliminating the organism, preventing re-infection.

- Dilute bleach in water (use four ounces of bleach per gallon of water) and apply the solution to runs, kennels, and food bowls. Caution: Thoroughly rinse the disinfected areas before you give your pets access to them. Bleach can harm animals if it contacts the skin or is ingested.
- Do not let your pet drink from streams or lakes. Bring iodine tablets with you when you camp to treat drinking water, as the iodine kills giardia. Anytime you're away from home, have fresh, clean drinking available for your pet.
- Keep the yard clean of feces. Feces from all animals, including birds, can be sources of infection. Regularly remove animal waste from your yard to help minimize exposure. Remember to wash your hands after contact with feces. All children and adults are especially susceptible to any type of infection (such as people undergoing chemotherapy or with AIDS), should avoid contact with animal waste.