



Levittown Animal Hospital

Healing Long Island's Pets Since 1965
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Giardia is a mucosoflagellate protozoan microorganism that can infect a variety of species, including dogs, cats and humans. Animals are infected by ingesting cysts in contaminated food or water or by ingesting feces from another infected animal. The Giardia trophozoite cells then attach to the lining of the intestines, and can cause diarrhea in some (but not all) animals.

The most common clinical sign is diarrhea or soft stools, although Giardia is often diagnosed as an incidental finding. Definitive diagnosis is based on identification of Giardia cysts on fecal examination. A specific Giardia ELISA test is also available, but it may be difficult to interpret the results of an ELISA test if there are no cysts being shed in the stool.

Treatment for Giardia is initiated regardless of whether or not the animal has diarrhea. The most common medication used is Panacur (fenbendazole), although metronidazole is sometimes used with varying levels of success. Treatment typically lasts for 3 to 5 days, but may be repeated if needed.

Environmental decontamination is just as important as medicating the affected animal. Dogs will often re-infect themselves despite successful medical treatment with the appropriate drug(s). Bathing the animals –or at least washing its hind end –will greatly reduce the risk of re-infection. All areas and surfaces where your pet has been should be considered contaminated. Toys are a commonly overlooked source of re-infection. Giardia cysts can be killed and inactivated with 2-5% Lysol or a 1% chlorine bleach solution.

Dilute ½ cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water to make an effective disinfectant solution with a shelf life of about 24 hours. When disinfecting non-porous surfaces, allow for at least 5 minutes of wet contact time with the bleach or Lysol before wiping the surface dry. Bedding can be put in a washer using hot water and/or bleach, and food/water bowls can be disinfected in a dishwasher. Also make sure the outside environment is free from any sources of contamination, especially puddles of standing water. Clean the environment daily until the infection is confirmed to be resolved.

You can help prevent your pets from acquiring or spreading Giardia by doing the following:

- 1) Immediately clean up after your pet when they defecate.
- 2) Never allow your pet to ingest anything off the ground outdoors.
- 3) Provide only filtered (or bottled) drinking water. While more common in well water, Giardia is sometimes found in municipal water supplies.
- 4) Have your veterinarian test a stool sample at least twice a year.

Dennis Leon, DVM
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