



GIARDIA

What is Giardia?

Giardia canis is a protozoan parasite (one celled animal) that causes intestinal infections in dogs and occasionally in cats. It is one of the most common parasites in the East Valley.

Where Did the Giardia Come From?

It is generally accepted that this is a waterborne parasite with transmission of infectious cysts, probably carried by aquatic mammals (beaver, muskrats, rats) but also perhaps by waterfowl. Motile (flagellated) organisms then attach to surface of the small intestine causing a malabsorption syndrome with soft voluminous stools. The importance of pets as a reservoir for human infections is not known, but humans likewise can contract this parasite.

What Are the Symptoms of Giardia?

It is seen mostly in dogs (10% well-treated dogs, up to 50% pups, up to 100% in infected kennels) and occasionally in cats (up to 11%).

The signs may be acute, intermittent or chronic, and can include soft, sometimes frothy diarrhea with a rancid smell. Persistence of the disease may lead to chronic debilitation with considerable weight loss and muscle atrophy.

How is It Diagnosed?

The signs and history are suggestive of the disease. Fresh fecal examinations will show motile organisms which are teardrop shaped and have a "falling leaf" appearance. Cysts may be seen as crescent shapes in a fecal flotation. A new fecal ELISA antibody test is also used in some cases.

How is It Treated?

Usually these pets can be treated at home unless badly debilitated, in which case, intravenous fluids and antibiotics are indicated. Several drugs have been used to kill the parasite with success rates approaching 90%.

Follow-Up

Repeat fecal examinations are needed to confirm the efficacy of the treatment. Giardia can lead to chronic debilitation so monitor your pet's weight and general health.

A new vaccination for dogs can prevent the infection, and in stubborn cases, can be used to eliminate infections.

Can I or My Family Catch Giardia From My Pet?

Giardiasis is the most common intestinal parasite in humans residing in North America. Giardia species may not be highly host specific, but there is no conclusive evidence that cysts shed by dogs and cats are infective for humans.

However to be safe, you should wash your hands after cleaning up your pet's stools. Should any member of your family develop diarrhea, mention to your doctor that your pet was diagnosed with Giardia, so your doctor can check for it.

Call Us If...

- Your pet has persistent diarrhea.
- Your pet's health worsens or it loses weight.

Special instructions: _____

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!