

Giardia 101

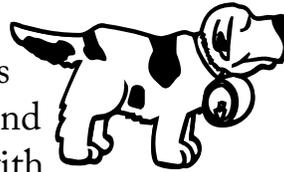
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What is Giardia?

"Giardiasis" is the infestation of a single celled parasitic organism... not quite a worm, not a virus or bacteria. This organism occurs world wide, and can infect just about any animal, however, dogs cannot pass it to humans or other household pets, because each species seems to be susceptible to a different genotype (variety) of Giardia. Giardia is one of the most common causes of diarrhea in rescue dogs because of the close quarters they keep, and the cysts that are shed in feces can last for several months in the environment, longer in damp or cool areas.

How do dogs get Giardia?

Recent research has shown that Giardia is a natural part of many canines' intestinal flora. That means most dogs have Giardia in their intestines at all times, but their immune system keeps the parasite from reproducing and causing an overabundance of the cells. Dogs can become infected with Giardia by drinking from a puddle, chewing on a stick, sniffing the dirt or grass where an infected dog has relieved himself in the last few months, or licking the behind of a dog that is shedding the parasite. Puppies and dogs with compromised immune systems are most susceptible to having symptoms associated with Giardiasis. Stressful events such as leaving to a new home, leaving their mother and litter mates, vaccinations, surgeries or infection with other diseases can cause the immune system to weaken, making an opening for a giardia flora to take over the intestines, leaving them feeling worn down, and with diarrhea and lack of appetite.



What are the Symptoms?

The most common symptom is diarrhea which can range from mild to extreme. Other symptoms can include loss of appetite, vomiting, lethargy, and weight loss. Also noted in some dogs is a foul smelling breath and a dull coat with flaky skin.

Source: Today's Veterinary Practice, September/October, 2013

How do you treat it?

Treatment is a simple oral "dewormer" administered daily for 10 days. For families who wish to treat their dog with natural remedies, Colloidal Silver has been proven very effective. On the last day of treatment (or more often, if desired) the dog should be bathed very well, focusing on the bum area last, and most thoroughly.

How do I prevent it?

Prevention in a shelter setting is difficult to say the least! New dogs are coming in every day from shelters or as strays. Dogs that are shedding the parasite don't necessarily show symptoms and with dogs stressing from food and environmental changes, sometimes Giardia isn't caught immediately. Since we pride ourselves as a Kennel Free rescue, we must keep up on disinfection daily, but the risk of exposure is constant. In your home, prevention is much more simple. Clean up the poo with a mixture of bleach and water (3/4 c:1 gal) and spray after the feces has been removed.

So what now?

With your adoption exam, a fecal sample will be sent to the lab for examination. If we are aware of exposure to Giardia, you will likely be sent home with a course of treatment to be sure that no other dogs in your home become infected. Because the change of environment will cause stress, and could lead to a Giardia outbreak, we suggest you administer the treatment even if your dog is not showing symptoms at the time of adoption.