

Giardiasis



Disease Vectors

Giardiasis is an intestinal infection caused by *Giardia duodenalis* (also known as *Giardia intestinalis* and *Giardia lamblia*), a parasite that commonly affects humans, dogs and cats. The risk of a zoonotic infection from companion animals is thought to be low because the type of *Giardia* that infects humans is usually not the same type that infects dogs and cats. Spread of this illness occurs through exposure to *Giardia* cysts shed in feces, ingesting the cysts directly, or from contaminated food or water. *Giardia* can survive for several weeks in moist, cool soil. Giardiasis is not spread through contact with blood.

Symptoms, Diagnosis & Treatment

Giardiasis symptoms typically appear one to two weeks after exposure. Clinical illness in humans, dogs and cats is similar and usually includes diarrhea accompanied by bloating, abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting.

Puppies and kittens are more likely to be infected, and most adult dogs in the U.S. do not have *Giardia* due to regular checkups and treatment. Giardiasis spreads readily in dogs and cats in crowded conditions such as kennels and shelters. Some animals may have been exposed to *Giardia* but do not have symptoms because the parasite may be eliminated or be present in a chronic asymptomatic state. Because symptoms of giardiasis in dogs and cats may indicate several illnesses, diagnosis should be made by a veterinarian.

There are no over-the-counter treatments for giardiasis in dogs and cats (CDC.gov); effective drug treatment must be done under veterinary care. Typically, dogs and cats are treated on an outpatient basis unless the animal has become sick and weak. Prescription drugs may be combined with bathing to reduce the likelihood of repeat infection. Repeat fecal exams are often required to confirm that the infection has been cured (PetMD.com). To prevent re-infection during treatment, clean the pet's area frequently. Remove any fecal material and sanitize

any surfaces the pet has had contact with (water/food bowls, toys, bedding, floors):

- Steam cleaning: 158°F (5 minutes) or 212°F (1 minute, 3 minutes at elevations >6500 feet).
- Dishwasher safe toys, water and food bowls: dishwasher with dry cycle or final rinse at least 113°F (20 minutes), 122°F (5 minutes,) or 162°F (1 minute).
- Disinfection: quaternary ammonium compound, chlorine bleach solution (3/4 c bleach to 1 gal water), accelerated hydrogen peroxide, or other products labeled for *Giardia*. Follow label directions for contact time.
- *Giardia* cysts do not survive desiccation (drying out); allow all surfaces to dry thoroughly after cleaning.

Prevention

Although the risk of contracting giardiasis from dogs and cats is thought to be small, good hygiene should be practiced, particularly with a symptomatic pet:

- Wash hands with soap and warm water after contact with the pet.
- Wear gloves when cleaning pet bedding or other contact areas.
- Remove fecal material daily.
- Limit pet exposure to symptomatic companion animals.

References

Giardia and Pets <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/prevention-control-pets.html>

Companion Animal Parasite Council: <https://capcvet.org/guidelines/giardia/>

Merck Veterinary Manual:

http://www.merckvetmanual.com/mvm/digestive_system/giardiasis/overview_of_giardiasis.html

[Giardiasis in Dogs and Cats http://www.petmd.com/dog/conditions/infectious-parasitic/c_multi_giardiasis](http://www.petmd.com/dog/conditions/infectious-parasitic/c_multi_giardiasis)

CDC Healthy Pets Healthy People: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/>

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