

Giardiasis refers to an intestinal infection that is caused by the protozoan parasite giardia, which is the most common intestinal parasite that is found in humans. Dogs develop the infection by ingesting infectious offspring (cysts) that are shed in another animal's feces or through a mama's milk. The contamination can be from direct or indirect contact with the infected cysts. The organisms, once ingested, make their way into the intestine, often causing diarrhea. The treatment is typically performed on an outpatient basis with a good prognosis. It is VERY common in puppies and certainly not reason to panic.

### **Causes**

One of the most common causes of the parasitic infection is the ingestion of infected fecal material, as the cysts are shed in animal feces. The most common cause of transmission is actually waterborne, as the parasite prefers the cool and moist environment. Up to 50 percent of young puppies will develop this intestinal infection, and up to 100 percent of dogs who are in the showring, housed in pairs or groups will develop it due to the exposure in shared living spaces.

### **Diagnosis**

Your vet will want to rule out other possibilities for the intestinal infection such as improper digestion (maldigestion), unabsorbed nutrients (malabsorption), or inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) prior to recommending a treatment option. In cats, your vet will want to differentiate between giardia and other primary causes of large bowel diarrhea. The organism is primarily detected in the feces. A fecal smear is normally sufficient to test for their presence, although it is very, very possible to have a false positive.

### **Treatment**

Treatment is typically done on an outpatient basis. Prescription drugs along with bathing are combined to reduce the likelihood of repeat infection and to remove the parasite from the dog's body. Albon and metronidazole (Flagyl) are two common treatments. Again, Heartland puppies are treated with both metronidazole before departure.

### **Living and Management**

It is important to observe for signs of dehydration, especially in younger animals. Administering the prescribed medication and taking the animal back in for examination are also important in a successful recovery. Remember that false positives on testing are common and that diagnosis should be based on symptoms.

### **Prevention**

Since one of the highest incidences of the infection spreading is in close quarters, seek places that offer private spaces for pets in order to avoid contamination from the other animals.