

Giardia

What is it?

Giardia is an intestinal parasite that can be passed between felines and canines. It affects the gastrointestinal tract and feeds off the nutrients of the host's food as they digest it, leaving little left for nutrients for the host's body.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptom that prompts us to test for giardia is persistent diarrhea or a foul-smelling, watery diarrhea with a mucus texture to it. Other symptoms can include decreased activity and appetite, bloating, weight loss, discolored stool, and intermittent diarrhea.

How is it tested for?

We can test for it in two ways: via fecal float or a giardia specific lab test. Both will require you to bring in a sample for us to analyze.

How is it treated?

All felines and canines that come into our care are dewormed with Secnidazole, a drug that takes care of Giardia. For adult dogs, cats, or kittens, one dose is usually adequate to treat and we can recheck a fecal in 5 days. For puppies, a second dose is administered a week after their initial dose, and they are retested 5 days after their final dose. If they have persistent Giardia that will not resolve, we may start them on a daily medication.

Can it be passed onto me?

Very rarely are canines or felines infected with the strain that infects humans. Most infections we see in them are strains that can be passed between dogs and cats. As long as you wash your hands between handling their stool and use good hygiene you will be set.

Can it be passed onto my personal pets?

Yes. The main way to get giardia is eating the cysts themselves, which are typically shed in feces and contaminate surfaces. Giardia can also be spread by sharing water bowls if the infected animal has the cysts in their mouth from grooming or eating their stool. Please be advised that if your personal animal contracts giardia, HSWM is not able to cover the costs for treatment.

Where should my foster be kept?

If your pet goes outside, you should attempt to take them to the same area for bathroom breaks throughout their treatment. Giardia is an extremely hardy virus that is hard to kill and knowing where the animal has been will allow you to effectively sanitize the environment. An area without much fabric or carpet is the best area for them to be confined to throughout treatment. It's important to make sure you are interacting with them throughout the day, especially now that they no longer have free range of the house and are in quarantine.

What is the best way to keep everyone safe?

Clean, clean, clean! Cleaning is the most effective way to keep everyone safe, as well as separating your foster animal from your personal pets until they have been cleared of giardia. Always pick up after your foster if they defecate inside or outside and sanitize the area right after. If you have a Giardia positive cat, it is best to keep up on their litter box every day, if not multiple times in a day and clean the scoop in between uses. If they kick litter out of their box, make sure to sanitize the area around the box after the debris is removed. After handling the infected stool, always wash your hands!

For laundry, it is best to wash it in hot water with both bleach and detergent. We don't mind if you bleach our laundry one bit, better ours than yours! If you ever need more laundry or cleaning supplies, please contact the Foster Coordinator and that can be arranged.