

GIARDIA

Giardia is a protozoan parasite that causes the intestinal illness *giardiasis* in pets and humans. It has been estimated that giardia is the most common waterborne human pathogen in the world and one of the most common in pets. **Spinoni are hunting dogs who come in contact with contaminated ground water during normal activity and are at risk of Giardia.** The disease in itself cannot kill a dog but it can make the dog's system weak enough to allow other diseases to attack.

Despite its prevalence, the disease is not always obvious and it is difficult to diagnose. The life cycle of the protozoan includes two distinct phases: cyst and trophozoite.

The cyst, a microscopic, hard-shelled, egg-shaped pod, is the infective element. Infection usually occurs when the dog drinks contaminated water from streams, puddles, well water, swimming pools or swamp-like areas. Another method is self-grooming of a contaminated hair. Consumption of infected prey animals is yet another method of infection. Cysts are very resistant to environmental factors and can survive more than two months in water at 46 degrees and about one month at 70 degrees. Boiling water has proved effective in eliminating cysts but filtration systems sometimes do not. Once the cysts are digested, gastric acids release the trophozoite. The trophozoite attaches with a suction to the brush border of the mucosa and begins dividing by binary fission every 12 hours. In 10 days the potential population is one million and more than one billion by the 15th day.

Eventually, trophozoites begin to form cysts and they are passed from the animal into the environment in the feces and the cycle begins again.

SYMPTOMS: Range from none to severe vomiting, fatigue, diarrhea and dehydration. The infected dog may be in pain and suffer weight loss. Another concern is that infected dogs with subtle symptoms may continue to shed cysts, putting other animals at risk.

Giardia is often difficult to diagnose accurately due to the different stages of the life cycle but there are several tests available. Once the diagnosis is made, the typical action is treatment. The problem is there is no medication that is 100% effective for controlling the disease and some have severe side effects. In addition, these treatments do not prevent future disease.

Given the difficulties in treating the infection in canines, the best way to fight giardiasis is to avoid it altogether.

There is now a vaccination for dogs called GiardiaVax that can be given to healthy dogs, 8 weeks of age or older. A booster is required two to three weeks later. The immunity has been shown to last at least one year.

DOGS AT HIGHER RISK OF EXPOSURE TO GIARDIA

Outdoor Dogs
Country Dogs
Hunting Dogs
Farm Dogs
Kennel Dogs
Adopted strays
Dogs in multi-pet households

Because Spinoni are hunting dogs, you should be aware of this disease. Puppies, older dogs and dogs with compromised immune systems usually suffer the most serious symptoms. This disease can make your dog weak and open to other more severe diseases.

For More information:
www.priory.com/vet/giardia.htm