

# Giardia



## What is giardia?

Giardia is a parasite that lives in the intestines of many animals (including dogs and cats) and humans. It is a single-celled parasitic species and is not a worm, bacteria or virus.

## What are the symptoms of giardia?

The majority of animals infected with giardia are asymptomatic, meaning there are no symptoms. When the infected animal is showing no symptoms, it is not harmful for the pet. But after weeks, months or years, the symptoms can appear. The affected animal may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Weight loss (especially without a decrease in appetite)
- Dehydration
- Poor coat condition

Note: The above possible giardia symptoms can also be symptoms of many other diseases.

***If your foster animal is experiencing any of these symptoms, contact the AWL NSW vet clinic (Kemps Creek carers only) or your branch Welfare Officer (AWL NSW branch carers only) during business hours.***

## How is giardia diagnosed?

A vet will examine and test a sample of the animals faeces and will advise if the animal has giardia or not.

## How is giardia spread?

Animals and humans can get giardia after swallowing the giardia organism which is found in the faeces (or particles from the faeces) of an already infected animal.

It can be caused from swallowing contaminated drinking water, a dog eating grass or putting a toy in his mouth or any other situation where giardia particles may be ingested.

## How is giardia prevented?

Ensure your foster animal has access to clean, fresh water at all times.

For foster dogs, avoid areas where there may be large amounts of faeces. Also try to avoid the dog drinking from unknown water bowls and puddles.

For foster cats, also clean litter trays and the environment regularly.

For humans, the risk of contracting giardia from an animal is small but there are steps you can take to further reduce the risk. Wash your hands (for at least 20 seconds) before you eat and also immediately after cleaning cat litter trays or picking up dog poo. Wear gloves when handling faeces and regularly clean and disinfect areas where your pets have access to,

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including bedding, toys, bowls, enclosures etc. Wash household surfaces regularly and wear gloves when gardening (giardia is sometimes found in contaminated soil).

Unfortunately the fortnightly (kittens/pups) or monthly flea, worm and tick treatment for foster animals does not include prevention for giardia.

## **How long can giardia stay in the environment?**

Giardia can survive in the environment anywhere from a few days up to 3 months. The colder the environment, the longer it stays. Eg. in a warm environment that has direct sunlight, giardia only lasts a few days but in cold water (less than 10°C), it can survive up to 1-3 months!

## **How is giardia treated?**

AWL NSW Kemps creek vet clinic will generally advise to treat the infected animal for 5 days in a row with panacur which a vet will dispense to you. They may also give a food to help with the diarrhoea to temporarily put the animal(s) on. In extreme cases if the animal is dehydrated or if deemed necessary by the vet, they may give subcutaneous (under the skin) fluids to the animal. At 7 days and 14 days from treatment starting, you'll be required to bring a stool sample for testing and if both samples test negative for giardia, the animal(s) are said to be clear from it. 2 samples taken 7 days apart must come back negative for our vet clinic to clear an animal for giardia.

For AWL NSW branch foster carers, speak to your branch vet clinic (after speaking to the Welfare Officer) as prescribed medication and treatment may vary slightly between vet clinics.

## **More information**

Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/prevention-control-pets.html>