



Coccidia in Dogs and Puppies

What is Coccidia

Two of the most frustrating but common parasites puppies face are Giardia and Coccidia. These are not worms, but two species of protozoa – single-celled organisms that reproduce in the intestines of infected animals and shed their spores into the environment through the infected animals' faeces.

Coccidia is a protozoa passed through the stool. An infected canine will eliminate the faeces containing the organism into the environment, where it can survive for up to one year. Once the parasite is consumed by your dog, the oocysts (immature coccidia) found in the stool will make their way to the digestive tract, enter the intestinal lining cells, and reproduce. The cells then rupture, releasing the parasite. The coccidia can reproduce very rapidly, thus causing much damage to the intestine.

Coccidiosis does not always show symptoms but will cause serious complications in puppies (because they have an underdeveloped immune system) and immunosuppressed dogs.

Symptoms of Coccidia in Dogs:

Coccidia can be present in the intestine of your pet and remain asymptomatic. However, once symptoms begin to become evident, your canine family member can become very ill. Take your dog to the clinic without delay if you see any of the following signs.

- Watery mucousy diarrhoea
- Explosive diarrhoea that may eventually become bloody
- Lethargy and weakness
- Dehydration
- Abdominal discomfort and tenderness
- Vomiting
- Weight loss
- Little or no appetite

"caring for the pets of ipswich since 1967"

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Causes of Coccidia in Dogs

Though some dogs may not show any ill signs from the coccidiosis, oocysts are still being shed in the faeces, which will continue the infectious cycle when passed to canine buddies.

- Dogs can ingest the coccidia from contaminated soil, hunting and eating infected rodents
- Faecal matter, or food and water that may have been contaminated by faecal matter, will also pass on the oocysts.
- Coccidia is very resistant in the environment, even in freezing conditions
- Coccidiosis becomes very prevalent in conditions of overcrowding, poor sanitation, and poor nutrition
- Coccidiosis can be a common occurrence in puppy mills, shelters, and very busy breeding kennels
- Puppies who are stressed, for example after weaning or leaving the mother, may develop symptoms

Diagnosis of Coccidia in Dogs

The veterinarian will base the diagnosis on the clinical signs seen when your dog arrives at the clinic, as well as information provided by you. After the physical examination, the veterinarian will test the stool of your pet. Results must be obtained from a sample that is less than 24 hours old, and the freshest sample you can provide is always the best. A faecal flotation test will be done, whereby the faecal matter is mixed with a solution that causes immature parasites to float to the top. The organisms are then placed on a glass slide and examined under the microscope.

Puppies and older immunosuppressed dogs may be tested for anaemia as this can be a common secondary condition to coccidiosis.

Treatment of Coccidia in Dogs

It should be noted that if you have a multi-dog family, all canine members should be treated, whether symptomatic or not, to prevent further cases of coccidia or recurrence.

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If your pet is very ill when he arrives at the clinic, he may need to be admitted in order to stabilize his condition before treatment, particularly if he is dehydrated or the diarrhoea is severe. If your pet is experiencing a milder case of coccidiosis, he can be treated at home, and will be given medication to kill the parasite. Oral medication is known to be very effective. Antibiotics may be prescribed as well.

Prevention:

Regardless of the medication your veterinarian prescribes, your attention to your dog's hygiene will be vital to eliminating the parasites once and for all.

Because these organisms are generally hardy and can exist in the environment for long periods, it's important to disinfect the areas the dog frequents. It is recommended you clean all hard surfaces – floors, crates, trash cans – with soap and water, rinsing thoroughly. Steam-clean carpets with the solution recommended for your cleaner

Correct Cleaning Products : Cleaning products containing quaternary ammonium compound products (QATS) – such as Pine-Sol Cleaner and Antibacterial, Clorox Broad Spectrum Quaternary Disinfectant Cleaner, and Fantastik All Purpose Cleaner – are recommended. Follow product instructions, and be certain the product stays in contact with the surface for the recommended amount of time.

You can also opt for your own mixture, using bleach and water (3/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water).

Upholstery: If your dog has an accident on upholstered furniture, use a carpet-cleaning agent with QATS to clean the area, then allow it to dry.

Use washing machines: Wash items that fit in your washing machine and machine-dry them at the highest heat possible or dry them in direct sunlight. This includes toys and bedding.

Dishwasher: Bowls and toys can be disinfected in your dishwasher, provided its rinse cycle gets hot enough. You can also disinfect some items in boiling water (boil them for at least one minute).

Outside Areas: It can be difficult to eradicate these parasites from lawns and outside areas and it's especially important to remove any faeces straight away. Put the faeces in a plastic bag and throw it away. Once spores form, they are almost impossible to kill. If possible, direct your dog to eliminate on concrete, where it's easier to thoroughly disinfect the area. If that's not possible, limit the area your dog has access to until he is treated.

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Protect Puppies & New Dogs: If your pup is pregnant, get her tested for coccidia before she gives birth so you can protect her puppies. If you have multiple dogs, it's also a good idea to test newcomers to the group, especially if the new dog comes from a shelter or some other location with a large number of dogs.

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