



# Giardia

## What is Giardia?

Giardia is a single celled protozoan parasite that can cause infection in both humans and pets. Giardia causes diarrhea that can be mild to severe. Some pets will not show any signs of infection. Pets can become infected with the organism when they ingest cyst form of the organism, either from contact with another infected animal or the environment (usually stagnant water). Humans can also become infected by ingesting the cyst form. This can occur if a human drinks from a contaminated water source or practices poor hygiene around an infected animal.

## How do I know if my pet has Giardia?

There are several tests for finding Giardia but the most sensitive test is the Giardia ELISA, which detects Giardia proteins in a stool sample. Pets that are symptomatic for Giardia will generally have a positive test result. The Giardia organism can be shed intermittently, so if infection with Giardia is suspected despite negative test results, the doctor may elect to repeat the Giardia ELISA.

## How is Giardia treated?

Giardia is treated with a drug called fenbendazole (Panacur®), given once a day for 5 to 10 days. Two weeks after treatment most pets will become negative on their Giardia ELISA test. If they do not become negative additional treatment may be needed. Most pets are cured with the first course of medication but on occasion the organism is tough to get rid of completely. Some pets may additionally be given a drug called metronidazole (Flagyl®) to help alleviate the symptom of diarrhea and to help rid them of the organism. Pets being treated for Giardia should be bathed thoroughly every other day during treatment (or at minimum once on the last day of treatment), to eliminate any cysts that could be clinging to the hair coat. If the pet had diarrhea from the Giardia then it is recommended to disinfect the home with steam cleaning of the carpets and use of a dilute bleach and water solution (1 part bleach:32 parts water) for hard floors. Wash all bedding in hot water.

***It is important to always practice and teach your children good hygiene around pets. Always wash your hands after handling your pet, especially before eating. Giardia is one of many parasites that pets can have and transmit to humans.***