



What is coccidia?

M. Iqbal, DVM, MS, PhD; Family Pet Hospital, Perry Hall, MD 21128

Coccidia are small protozoans (one-celled organisms) that live in the intestinal tracts of dogs and cats. They cause disease most commonly in puppies and kittens less than six months of age, in adult animals whose immune system is suppressed, or in animals who are stressed in other ways (e.g.; change in ownership, other disease present). As a puppy ages, he tends to develop a natural immunity to the effects of coccidia. As an adult, he may carry coccidia in his intestines, and shed the cyst in the feces, but experience no ill effects.

How are coccidia transmitted?

Although most infections are the result of spread from the mother, this is not always the case. Since young puppies, usually those less than six months of age, have no immunity to coccidia, the organisms reproduce in great numbers and parasitize in the intestines. Any infected puppy or kitten is contagious to other puppies or kittens. It is wise to isolate those infected from those that are not.

What are the symptoms of

coccidiosis? The primary sign of an animal suffering with coccidiosis is diarrhea. The diarrhea may be mild to severe depending on the level of infection. Blood and mucous may be present, especially in advanced cases. Severely affected animals may also vomit, lose their appetite, become dehydrated, and in some instances, die from the disease. It should be mentioned that stress plays a role in the development of coccidiosis.

What are the risks? Although many cases are mild, it is not uncommon to see severe, bloody diarrhea result in dehydration and even death. This is most common in animals that are ill or infected with other parasites, bacteria, or viruses. Coccidiosis is very contagious, especially among young puppies.

What is the treatment of

coccidiosis? Fortunately, coccidiosis is treatable with drugs. Because these drugs do not kill the organisms, but rather inhibit their

reproduction capabilities, elimination of coccidia from the intestine is not rapid. By stopping the ability of the protozoa to reproduce, time is allowed for the puppy's own immunity to develop and remove the organisms. Drug treatments of one to three weeks are usually required.

How is coccidiosis prevented or controlled?

Because coccidia are spread by the feces of carrier animals, it is very important to practice strict sanitation. All fecal material should be removed. Housing needs to be such that food and water cannot become contaminated with feces. Clean water should be provided at all times. Most disinfectants do not work well against coccidia; incineration of the feces, and steam cleaning, immersion in boiling water, or a 10% ammonia solution are the best methods to kill coccidia. Coccidia can withstand freezing.

Cockroaches and flies can mechanically carry coccidia from one place to another. Mice and other animals can ingest the coccidia and when killed and eaten by a dog, for instance, can infect the dog. Therefore, insect and rodent control is very important in preventing coccidiosis.

The coccidia species of dogs and cats do not infect humans.

(410) 529-7297 (PAWS)
www.FamilyPetsHospital.com
info@FamilyPetsHospital.com

Partnership in Pet Care = Happy + Healthy + Longer living Pet