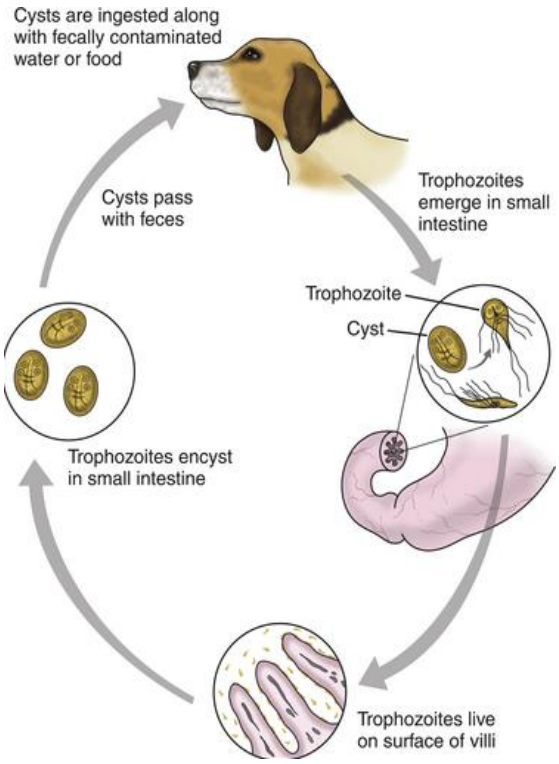
Giardia – Culprit for Diarrhea

What Is It?

Giardia has been seen more frequently in dogs, especially if they have ventured in Rushcutter's Bay and Beare Park. All dogs can be affected with some showing clinical signs, but the younger population (less than 1 year old) seem to be over represented.

Giardia is a parasite that can be found on any surface, in soil, or water that has been contaminated by an infected animal. It is the cysts (egg like structures) which live on these contaminated areas, and are very hardy, and love cool and wet areas.



What does it cause?

Giardia uses their whip like tentacles to move and latch on into the intestine using their suction cup like structures. This causes the cells of the intestine to degenerate, preventing absorption of any nutrients of digested food and its water content. Ultimately, these dogs have on-and-off watery diarrhea that can appear oily, and may have blood. Vomiting, dehydration, and decreased appetite can also be possible sign. Unfortunately, some patients require hospitalization for fluid therapy and supportive care.

How is Giardia diagnosed?

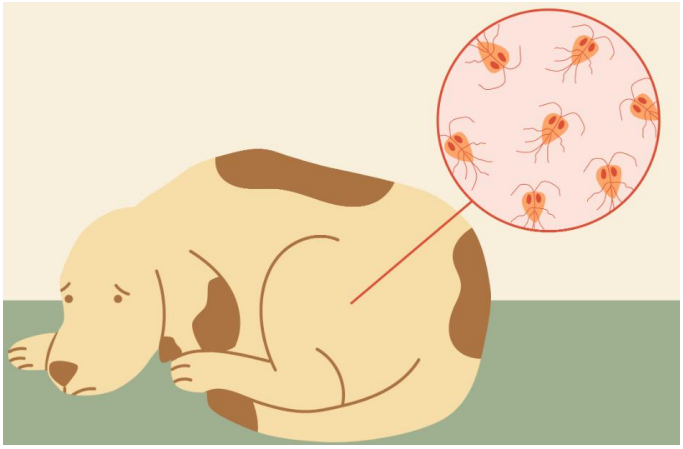
Giardia can be very tricky to diagnose, as they are shed intermittently in the stool and may be difficult to detect. The recommendation at this stage is to send off the stool sample to a lab, where they have specialized tests to detect particles of Giardia in the stool and is a more sensitive and reliable test. Given the difficult nature to detect Giardia infections, it is recommended that we have a pooled sample from multiple bowel movements to ensure an accurate result.

How is Giardia treated?

As Giardia is a parasite, medications from the vet are indicated – natural therapies are unlikely to be any benefit. Your vet will prescribe a few days course of a medication to clear the infection.

Dogs should also require bathing during and at the end of treatment, as the cysts can live on the fur. Stools should always be picked up after a bowel movement. At home, bedding and water bowls should be cleaned appropriately to avoid reinfection.

Can I get infected from Giardia?



It is very unlikely for a human to become infected with Giardia from a cat or dog. The most common Giardia found is specific to the cat or dog. However, it is still recommended that we maintain good hygiene practices such as regular hand washing to remove any pet fecal matter.

If your dog has bouts of diarrhea that persists for more than 2 days, it may be a good idea for a thorough physical examination and consultation with your vet.

Dr Alex