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GIARDIA

Giardia is a parasite that infects the lining of the intestine and causes gastrointestinal disease with symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea and loss of appetite in dogs and cats. I have also known it to cause death in very young puppies and kittens.

It also can infect human beings. Its nickname being 'beaver fever' that a lot of diehard campers would be familiar with.

Giardia is found to reside in high moisture and stagnant areas. It can reside in the soil, puddles and ponds. It is also carried in the feces of wild mammals and that can infect the soil in our back yards.

Dogs that have a tendency to eat other mammals (such as rabbits) feces are at high risk for infection.

Giardial infection can be diagnosed by performing a rectal smear and looking under the microscope under very high power for the presence of giardial cysts.

Once diagnosed, it is very straight forward to treat, however, animals tend not to develop immunity as a result of infection, hence can be reinfected over and over.

Up until 2 years ago, a vaccine existed to protect dogs against giardia, but no longer is available, unfortunately.

My recommendation for dogs that habitually eat rabbit feces, even if they show no symptoms, for owners to have their dogs feces tested, as this is a parasite that can be transmitted to people.