

# Coccidia

## Information about Coccidia

### What is coccidiosis?

**Coccidiosis** is an intestinal tract infection caused by a single-celled organism called **coccidia**. Coccidiosis typically refers to gastrointestinal infections with Isospora species of coccidia. At least four different genera of coccidia can infect dogs: Isospora canis, I. ohioensis, I. neorivolta, and I. burrowsi. These microscopic parasites spend part of their life cycle in the lining cells of the intestine. Despite damaging these cells, most infections in dogs are not associated with any detectable clinical signs. Infections without clinical signs are called sub-clinical infections. The species that most commonly causes clinical infections in dogs is I. canis, but Cryptosporidium parvum (another coccidian parasite) can as well, especially in puppies.

### How did my dog become infected with coccidia?

Your dog most likely became infected with coccidia from swallowing **oocysts** (immature coccidia) that are found in dog feces and soil contaminated with feces. Infected dogs pass **oocysts** in the feces. These oocysts are very resistant to a wide variety of environmental conditions and can survive for some time on the ground. Under the right conditions of temperature and humidity, these oocysts 'sporulate' or become infective. If a susceptible dog ingests the sporulated oocysts, the oocysts will release 'sporozoites' that invade the intestinal lining cells and set up a cycle of infection in neighboring cells. Dogs may also become infected indirectly by eating a mouse that is infected with coccidia.



### What kinds of problems are caused by coccidiosis?

The most common clinical sign of coccidiosis is diarrhea, but most dogs that are infected with coccidia do not have any clinical signs. When the coccidial oocysts are found in the stool of a dog without diarrhea, they are generally considered a transient, insignificant finding.

However, in puppies and debilitated adult dogs, coccidiosis may cause severe watery diarrhea, dehydration, abdominal distress, and vomiting. In severe cases, death may occur.

### How is coccidiosis treated?

Your pet will be prescribed medication and in severe infections, it may be necessary to repeat the treatment. If the diarrhea is severe and your dog is dehydrated, other medications and IV fluids may be required. Reinfection of susceptible dogs is common so environmental disinfection is important. The use of diluted chlorine bleach [one cup (250 ml) of bleach mixed in 3.8 L of water] is effective.

**If you're concerned your pet has Coccidia or has serious vomiting and diarrhoea please seek veterinary attention early. Our team of amazing veterinarians are available 24/7 for any emergencies when your vet is not available. Feel free to call us if you aren't sure you should see a veterinarian or not, and our team can assist you.**



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