

Coccidia

Coccidia is an intestinal parasite that most commonly affects younger animals but can also affect adult dogs and cats. There are several species of this tiny, single celled parasite but the most common is *Isospora canis*. Anywhere between 3 - 38% of dogs and 3 – 36% of cats in North America have coccidial infections.



There are several stages to the life cycle of a coccidian but the most important stage is the oocyst because these are the key to diagnosing an animal with an infection. Coccidia are found in the wall of the intestine and the most common symptom is diarrhea that may be bloody but weight loss and dehydration can also be seen. Very severely affected animals can show signs of anorexia, vomiting and depression. Diagnosis of a coccidial infection is done by a thorough history of the cat or dog, clinical signs and finding the oocysts in a fecal examination. To treat a coccidial infection an antibiotic is used.

Cats and dogs come into contact with coccidian through the ingestion of the sporulated oocysts from contaminated environments. They can also be ingested through the cat or dog ingesting a secondary host for the parasite. Coccidia is extremely host specific meaning that coccidian that affect one species such as dogs can not affect any other species such as cats. Dogs and cats may shed coccidian in their feces and not show any symptoms.



Coccidia oocysts cannot sporulate into infective oocysts at temperatures above 104°F or below 68°F and sporulation occurs rapidly in less than 16 hours at temperatures between 86°F and 98.6°F. Sporulated oocysts can be resistant to adverse environmental conditions and can survive as long as a year in moist, protected environments as long as they are not exposed to extremely high or low temperatures. Oocysts sporulate quickly once in the environment and daily removal of feces can aid in the prevention of coccidiosis.

While there is no known transfer of coccidian from animals to people good hygiene is always the best way to prevent infection.

For more information feel free to contact Cedar Grove Veterinary Services at 920-668-6212.