

# Coccidiosis in the Kennel Environment

## What is coccidiosis?

Coccidiosis is a parasitic disease of the intestinal tract caused by tiny organisms called coccidia. There are actually several parasites that fall under the umbrella description of Coccidiosis. These are protozoan parasites that multiply in the intestinal tracts of dogs and cats generally in animals six months or younger. These parasites can depress the immune systems and can lead to further complications and infections.

The disease is spread from one animal to another by contact with feces. The primary sign of coccidiosis is diarrhea. The diarrhea may be mild or severe depending on the infection level. The animal can generally show signs of lethargy, dehydration and loss of appetite. Many breeders encounter the symptoms in the four to twelve week age groups.

Puppies are not born with coccidia in their intestines. Once born the puppy is frequently exposed to its mother's feces and if the mother is shedding the infective cysts in her feces then her young may likely come in contact with them and become infected. Since puppies have no immunity the organisms quickly reproduce in the puppy's intestines. Once the infection has set in, symptoms should be apparent in about two weeks. Coccidiosis is very contagious especially among young pups so early isolation and treatment is critical. As puppies age they tend to develop natural immunities to the effects of coccidia and as an adult may carry coccidia in their intestines but shed the cyst in the feces and experience no ill effects.

There are a variety of conditions that can contribute to the development of coccidiosis. Among them might be stress from relocation, transportation or untimely handling. We think that puppies are meant to be loved and petted but like all young animals their rest is paramount to survivability.

Fortunately coccidiosis is treatable. There is an assortment of drugs that have had success in the treatment of the disease but most fail to cure the root cause, which is out-numbering the coccidia, so the system can function in its normal routine. While the drugs don't kill the organisms they do inhibit the parasites ability to reproduce, which slows the spread.

It is becoming increasingly accepted that colonic microbiota (intestinal bacteria) play a vital role in prevention of coccidiosis and maintenance of the animals health. The intestines carry both good and bad bacteria at all times. The need to have a greater number of beneficial bacteria to counter the bad bacteria cannot be stated strongly enough. *Prebiotics* have shown to be an efficient way to significantly modify the composition of the gut microbiota and thus greatly enhance the animal's ability to ward off initial infection and fight infection that has already taken hold. Preventative measures to insure a healthy intestinal environment means far fewer problems for breeders in dealing with illness and infections.

Good housekeeping is critical to a healthy environment because coccidia are spread by feces. All fecal material should be removed and housing should be designed so that food and water cannot be contaminated. Of course clean water is necessary at all times. Unfortunately most disinfectants do not work very well against coccidia so the incineration, immersion in boiling water or steam cleaning are suggested methods of eradicating the coccidia. Coccidia is not affected by freezing weather. Other methods of transmission can be mice and insects so insect and rodent control is required. The good news is that coccidia is not known to be transmittable to humans.

Courtesy of Hillsboro Company