



Always consult with a veterinarian that you feel comfortable with before diagnosing or treating any disease on your own. This information is for reference only.

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## Coccidiosis

### Issue Description

*Coccidiosis is the disease caused by coccidian infection. Coccidiosis is a parasitic disease of the intestinal tract of animals, caused by coccidian protozoa. The disease spreads from one animal to another by contact with infected feces, or ingestion of infected tissue. Diarrhea, which may become bloody in severe cases, is the primary symptom. Most animals infected with coccidia are asymptomatic; however, young or immuno-compromised animals may suffer severe symptoms, including death.*

*People often first encounter coccidia when they acquire a young puppy who is infected. The infectious organisms are canine/feline-specific and are not contagious to humans.*

*Young puppies are frequently infected with coccidia and often develop active Coccidiosis -- even puppies obtained from diligent professional breeders. Infected puppies almost always have received the parasite from their mother's feces. Typically, healthy adult animals shedding the parasite's oocysts in their feces will be asymptomatic because of their developed immune systems. However, undeveloped immune systems make puppies more susceptible. Further, stressors such as new owners, travel, weather changes, and unsanitary conditions are believed to activate infections in susceptible animals.*

### Symptoms

Symptoms in young dogs are universal: at some point around 2-3 months of age, an infected dog develops persistently loose stools. This diarrhea proceeds to stool containing liquid, thick mucus, and light colored fecal matter. As the infection progresses, spots of blood may become apparent in the stool, and sudden bowel movements may surprise both dog and owner alike. Coccidia infection is so common that any pup under 4 months old with these symptoms can almost surely be assumed to have coccidiosis.

### Treatment

Fortunately, the treatment is inexpensive, extremely effective, and routine. A veterinarian can easily diagnose the disease through low-powered microscopic examination of an affected dog's feces, which usually will be replete with oocysts. One of many easily administered and inexpensive drugs will be prescribed, and, in the course of just a few days, an infection will be eliminated or perhaps reduced to such a level that the dog's immune system can make its own progress against the infection. Even when an infection has progressed sufficiently that blood is present in feces, permanent damage to the gastrointestinal system is rare, and the dog will most likely make a complete recovery without long-lasting negative effects.

If one dog of a litter has coccidiosis, then most certainly all dogs at a breeder's kennels have active coccidia infections. Breeders should be notified if a newly-acquired pup is discovered to be infected with coccidia. Breeders can take steps to eradicate the organism from their kennels, including applying medications in bulk to an entire facility.

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