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COCCIDIOSIS

Coccidia are organisms called Protozoa which can infect the intestinal tract of dogs and cats. They live inside the cells that line the intestines and shed eggs or oocysts into the stool. In large numbers or in immune compromised animals (young or sick) they can cause a disease called coccidiosis.

SIGNALMENT

Coccidia are transmitted through contact with infected stool or by ingesting rabbits or rodents with coccidia encysted in their muscles. Coccidiosis is most serious in young animals and animals that are sick, stressed or heavily infected with other parasites. Healthy adult dogs may occasionally shed coccidia in their stool and show no clinical signs. It is also possible that the pet may eat stool from cattle or sheep or rabbits or rodents and pass oocysts in their stool without actually becoming infected with it.

CLINICAL SIGNS

Clinical signs of coccidial infection may include bloody or mucoid diarrhea, abdominal pain, dehydration, anemia, loss of appetite, weight loss, and vomiting. These signs are often seen after periods of stress. Nursing or recently weaned puppies and kittens, or animals that are sick or immunocompromised are most susceptible. Signs can also be precipitated by stress of shipping or change of environment or diet.

DIAGNOSIS

Coccidiosis is diagnosed by both clinical signs and the presence of coccidia oocysts in a stool sample.

TREATMENT

Coccidiosis is treated only when clinical signs are present. Treatment consists of using anti-coccidial drugs. These come in tablet or liquid forms and must be given for one to two weeks depending upon response to treatment.

PROGNOSIS

Once diagnosed, most animals respond very well to treatment. A few will continue to shed coccidia intermittently without clinical signs. Rarely a severely infected animal may re-infect itself and have reoccurring clinical signs.

PREVENTION

Sanitation is the key to preventing coccidiosis. Because younger animals are most often infected, kennels and catteries must pay close attention to proper hygiene. Once contaminated, it is difficult for an establishment to completely eliminate coccidia. Strong ammonia compounds are beneficial as is steam cleaning. Treating infected dogs and cats after whelping or queening will prevent spread of infection to their young.

All animals with signs of diarrhea, loss of appetite, or weight loss should be examined by a veterinarian and checking a fresh stool sample is an important part of that exam.