

Fecal Flotation and *Giardia* Test

- Intestinal parasites can cause serious illness and even death in pets.
- Some parasites are *zoonotic*, which means they can infect humans.
- Fecal flotation and *Giardia* testing can identify intestinal parasites, which is important for determining the best treatment and helping to ensure a full recovery.
- Even pets that are receiving regular parasite preventive medication need periodic parasite testing. No single medication is effective against all possible parasites.

What Are Fecal Flotation and *Giardia* Tests?

Roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, and microscopic intestinal parasites (like coccidia and *Giardia*) are relatively common in pets, but that doesn't mean that they can't cause serious illness. Young, sick, or debilitated pets can even die if they are heavily infected with parasites. If your pet has parasites, accurate diagnosis, including identification of the parasite(s) present, is important to determine the best treatment and help ensure a full recovery. Fecal diagnostic tests, such as fecal flotation and *Giardia* testing, are an important part of this process.

Why Does My Pet Need Fecal Flotation and *Giardia* Testing?

Parasites can cause clinical signs such as diarrhea, vomiting, and weight loss. If your pet is showing any suspicious signs, your veterinarian may recommend performing fecal flotation and *Giardia* testing to determine if parasites are the cause. However, some pets don't develop clinical signs, so periodic testing of "healthy" pets is also recommended. Your pet's routine wellness examination is a convenient time to perform parasite testing. Even pets that regularly receive parasite preventive medication (e.g., daily or monthly medication) should be tested periodically because no single medication is effective against all possible parasites.

Any new pets that are being introduced into your home (whether adult pets or puppies/kittens) should

be tested for parasites before meeting your other pets. Many parasites are transmitted through contact with fecal material, so if your new pet has worms, he/she can infect your other pets. Even if your new pet seems perfectly healthy, you should schedule an examination with your veterinarian as soon as possible. Parasites, viruses, and other medical problems aren't always apparent, so your veterinarian may recommend a fecal flotation and *Giardia* test, along with some other diagnostic tests, to help ensure that your new pet is healthy before playing with your other pets and family members.

Some intestinal parasites, such as roundworms and hookworms, are *zoonotic*. This means that they can infect humans. Periodically testing your pets for parasites is a good way to help protect your other family members.

Even pets that are receiving regular parasite preventive medication need periodic parasite testing. No single medication is effective against all possible parasites.

How Are Fecal Flotation and *Giardia* Tests Performed?

To test for intestinal parasites, your veterinarian needs a stool sample from your pet. Ask your veterinarian for a stool specimen container. Otherwise, a clean, dry container or plastic bag can be used to hold the sample. A fresh sample is preferable to a sample that is more than a day old, and only a small amount (approximately a teaspoonful) is generally needed for testing. Also, if you have multiple cats sharing a litterbox, or multiple dogs using the same exercise area, many veterinarians will accept a "representative" sample from your household of pets.

If you aren't comfortable collecting a specimen at home, your veterinarian can obtain a stool sample during an office visit, either during a routine rectal examination of your pet or with a device called a *fecal loop*. A fecal loop is a small plastic wand with a small loop on the end. After applying lubricant, your veterinarian can gently insert the loop into your pet's rectum and collect a sample of fecal material.

To perform a fecal flotation, your veterinarian places a small amount of fecal material into a small container and mixes it with a special solution. This solution is made so that the eggs of many parasites (such as whipworms, hookworms, and roundworms) will float to the top. Your veterinarian then covers the top of the container with a microscope cover slip and allows it to sit for a few minutes. During this time, the parasite eggs float to the top of the solution and stick to the cover slip. After a few minutes, your veterinarian collects the cover slip from the top of the tube, places it on a microscope slide, and examines it under a microscope to find and identify the eggs.

Giardia organisms can sometimes be identified using fecal flotation, but some veterinarians prefer

to use a different test, called a SNAP test, to screen for *Giardia*. The SNAP test detects *Giardia antigens* (proteins produced by the parasite) in the fecal material of infected pets.

Some veterinarians perform fecal testing in the office, so results may be available the same day. Other practices use an outside laboratory for diagnostic testing, so results may take a few days. Some veterinarians use other diagnostic techniques (such as centrifugation or evaluation of fecal smears) to help identify parasites.

What Are the Benefits of Fecal Flotation and *Giardia* Testing?

Testing for parasites helps identify zoonotic parasites that can pose a risk to children and other family members.

Although some pets infected with intestinal parasites develop diarrhea or other clinical signs, many pets don't show any signs at all. The only way to identify and treat infected pets is to test them periodically for evidence of infection. Fecal flotation and *Giardia* testing are helpful for identifying infected pets.