

Get the facts about parasitic colitis in dogs

When your pup is having poop problems, parasites may be at play. Here's the low-down on this relatively common and treatable canine condition.

Colitis—or inflammation and irritation of the large bowel (or colon)—can have a number of causes, including parasites. Parasitic colitis occurs when your dog's gastrointestinal (GI) system becomes inundated with parasites that prevent it from completing the digestion process properly. Offending parasites can include Giardia, Cryptosporidium and Coccidia as well as roundworms, whipworms, tapeworms and hookworms.

These intestinal parasites can be passed to your pet in a number of ways:

- > Ingestion of parasite eggs or larvae
- > Contact with an infected animal or infected stools, soil, food or water
- > From mother to puppy either before birth or through nursing
- > Infected fleas

What it looks like

Colitis may occur suddenly and resolve within a few days; it may be sporadic, with signs that wax and wane over a few weeks; or it could last weeks to years. Generally, the longer the condition is present, the worse your dog's symptoms will be.

The classic sign of colitis is abnormal stools. Your pup's poop may be loose and watery, semi-formed, and you may see blood or mucus mixed in. Your dog may

also defecate more often, with urgency, but produce less each time, or he may strain but nothing comes out. Other signs may include vomiting, poor appetite, weight loss or visible worms in the stools.

The good news? Parasitic colitis is both treatable and preventable. Here's what you need to know.

Diagnosis and treatment

To determine what's causing your pet's colitis, your veterinarian will ask detailed questions about your pet's clinical signs and history (such as exposure to other dogs, travel and diet), perform a physical exam (including a check of your dog's rectum and abdomen), evaluate a fecal sample under the microscope and run cytology and blood tests. Other tests, including radiography, ultrasonography or colonoscopy, may also be used if initial test results are not definitive or to rule out conditions. Sometimes these tests can be inconclusive, and the veterinarian may still recommend treatment.

Treatment of parasitic colitis

includes eliminating the parasites with a deworming medication. To help your dog's GI system return to normal function, your veterinarian will likely suggest a 24- to 48-hour fast followed by a diet with added fiber to bulk up stool and encourage growth of useful bacteria. Supportive medications that may aid in your dog's recovery include anti-inflammatory, antibiotic, antimicrobial, glucocorticoid and immunosuppressive agents.

Prognosis and prevention

For most dogs diagnosed with parasitic colitis, the prognosis for a speedy recovery is excellent once a dewormer is on board. If the colitis does not resolve, further testing may be needed to determine whether an underlying condition is contributing to the problem.

Parasites can spread easily among dogs, so be sure to give yours a monthly parasite preventive, watch what he eats, make sure all vaccinations are current and limit his contact with unfamiliar animals when possible. Your veterinarian may recommend routine fecal testing and deworming if your dog's risk for recurrence is high.

