Giardia and Giardia Vaccination

Giardia is a parasite that lives in many different and often unexpected water sources. Giardia parasites are ingested by pets drinking out of contaminated water sources. The parasite then lives in the intestines of the pet, and is passed back out into the environment through the pet's feces. Giardia causes giardiasis, which is the most frequently occurring protozoa waterborne illness in North America. It can be found anywhere from puddles and ponds to swimming pools and streams. Your pet can contract the disease by drinking contaminated water, or even by licking his paws after walking in an infected area! Symptoms include diarrhea, weight loss, and poor weight gain despite normal appetite. Although the potential for pain in infected pets is not known, humans with giardiasis can suffer from intense abdominal pain and cramping. Complicating things is the fact that many pets contract the disease and show few symptoms, but are still capable of passing it to other animals or you.

Pets at the highest risk for exposure to Giardia are puppies, kittens, older pets and pets with compromised immune systems. many other pets are at an increased risk of exposure, including:

- Outdoor dogs
- Outdoor cats
- Hunting dogs
- Farm dogs
- Kennel dogs
- Adopted dogs
- Pets in multi-pet households

In addition, certain areas pose a high risk of exposure for pets. They include:

- Dog shows
- Parks
- Camp Grounds
- Preschools
- Beaches
- Ponds and Lakes
- Boarding facilities
- Exercise areas
- Pools
- Playgrounds
- Sandboxes
- Creeks, Rivers, Streams, Drainage Culverts

It is also believed that giardiasis can be transmitted from pets to humans. Recent discoveries have led researchers to believe that dog-to-human transmission is much more likely than previously thought.

A Giardia vaccination has been developed for dogs only. GiardiaVax® is manufactured by Fort Dodge and is formulated to prevent Giardia and the cyst shedding associated with it. The vaccination is administered, boosted in 3 weeks, and then given yearly thereafter.