Removal of Giardia in a Cattery

First, be sure of the right diagnosis before any treatment is attempted for diarrhea in the cattery. There is an in-office PCR specific IDEXX SNAP test for Giardia that should be performed on absolutely fresh stool obtained by your vet at the time of the testing, if diarrhea caused by Giardia is suspected. Have your vet loop out a fresh sample at the time of testing for giardia, coccidia or TF (Tritrichomonas Foetus) or if TF is suspected a flush of 10 cc saline is injected into the anus and the wash of fecal material is then centrifuged before testing is done. The specific method for TF testing and diagnosis is contained in the new Owner's Guide to TF, found at this link: http://www.cvm.ncsu.edu/docs/documents/ownersguide_tfoetus_revised_120909.pdf

If your vet is agreeable to home testing for giardia, buy a few Idexx Giardia Snap tests from your vet and a supply of fecal loops to obtain fresh samples for testing at home. Reportedly the test is about $15 per test when obtained from the vet. The Giardia Snap test is extremely easy to use, very accurate and specific for Giardia. There is also a vet lab test panel that includes the PCR Giardia (e.g. Idexx Feline Diarrhea Panel) that can be helpful if the diarrhea is possibly caused by other organisms or by a combination of organisms. If you need to buy a quantity of 15 or more tests to do bulk Giardia PCR Snap testing at home, they can be obtained online: http://www.vetmeddirect.com/Snap-Giardia-Antigen-Test-Kit-15-Count--pr--014IDX0315

Persistent or on-again/off-again cycles of diarrhea can be caused by many different organisms, and the ones mentioned above will NOT be found on regular stool floatation and microscopic examination procedures designed to look for parasites. Diagnosis and treatment must be tailored to the specific causative organism in each case! So a careful diagnosis is critical to successful eradication of the specific diarrhea-causing agent. This article is only concerned with how to get rid of confirmed Giardia protozoa infections from a multi-cat home or cattery situation.

So many strains of Giardia are now resistant to metronidazole/Flagyl that I would recommend obtaining Panacur liquid or granules from your vet and doing the 7 day protocol on Mom and *every* other cat/kitten in the house now, to avoid a problem with small kittens contracting Giardia once they start to use a common litter box or drink from potentially contaminated water sources. You MUST treat EVERY cat in the entire house, for the entire 7 days if you are to completely eradicate the Giardia cysts from all the non-symptomatic carriers who will just re-seed it back into your most susceptible animals, and to you, if you are not careful! It does not matter if cats are isolated in other rooms of the house, if the initial source of the Giardia is possibly in the well or tap water. You *have* to eradicate it from the entire population at ONCE to ensure it is really gone, and not just hiding in temporarily asymptomatic cats. Otherwise it will just come back with a roar the next time any cat or kitten gets stressed, and they will just spread it back to everyone else again. It's bad enough to have to do eradication procedures once, but so much worse to have to keep repeating the whole treatment procedure, because of slipping up with even one cat. Treat everyone for the entire 7 days and the problem will not come back, assuming you fix the well or tap water problem that is the likely source of the initial Giardia infection.
Also, while the well or tap water is the most likely initial infection source, it could be re-seeding itself from tiny particles clinging to the sides of the litter box, if careful and *daily* litter box dumping and cleaning is not performed. This is no time to be using litter box fillers for more than a single day, or not thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting each box daily. Once the diarrhea troubles are completely over, you can go back to an every other day schedule for litter box dumping and cleaning.

Are you boiling all water for at least 3 minutes that is used for the cats as drinking water or put into their food? It is not enough just to use a Pur filter on the tap, as the Giardia cysts are very small in particulate size and some may not get filtered out with the Pur process. Only a vigorous rolling boil for at least 3 minutes counted after it first begins to boil is sufficient to eradicate and kill Giardia cysts from a water source. Alternatively, use gallons of store-purchased steam distilled water for all cat/kitten water bowls or any water that is to be used in food items for them. Water and food bowls should be thoroughly cleaned each day as well.

Are you always vigorously scrubbing out every litter box each day with detergent on a 3M green scrubbing pad and once it is completely cleaned and the soap is rinsed off, re-rinse it with a small amount of pure regular strength bleach and allowing it to dry completely before re-using all litter boxes? It is necessary to physically scrub all surfaces of each litter box with detergent, before adding the bleach rinse, as the presence of fecal matter or dirt will inactivate the bleach's ability to sterilize the litter box surfaces. I find it so much simpler to have a complete second set of litter boxes so that one set can "rest" for a day while the other set is in use. Some breeders find it helpful to use an UV lamp or sunshine to irradiate the cleaned boxes, but I have found the bleach rinse to be sufficient in practice. Steam sterilizing of the physically cleaned litter boxes is another acceptable alternative to using bleach sterilization.

There is a way to make a Mom-proof kitten litter box to keep the darlings from using Mom's litter box during early kittenhood. The theory is to turn one of those cheap plastic 18 gallon storage boxes (with the lid on), upside down, cutting a kitten-sized hole at ground level for the kittens to pass through, but not quite big enough for Mom cat to get through. Inside the storage box, will be a low sided regular litter box for the kittens to use exclusively.

At the same time, I would also recommend making Mom's litter box higher-sided so that she will have to jump into it, while small kittens will not be able to jump into it until they are much older. For this purpose I use another one of those cheap plastic 18 gallon storage boxes, used with the lid left off for this purpose, so only Mom cat can jump in to use the litter inside it, and the kittens cannot until they are old enough to be treated with Panacur, if needed.

Kittens can be dosed with Panacur according to weight after they are at least 4-5 weeks old. Panacur liquid is dosed at 1cc per every 5 pounds of body weight. I don't have the dosage for the 12.5% granules as the granules are more expensive to get from my vet for some reason. Panacur liquid is quite well tolerated by the kittens and cats, as it does not taste vile like metronidazole/Flagyl does. There is an added advantage to the Panacur, as it also removes pretty much every other kind of cat-indwelling worm except tapeworms (from fleas) at the same time!
Panacur granules are also well tolerated in the food, but since you have to make sure that each cat gets an *exact* dose according to their weight, you can't just dump it into the food and walk away. The one time I used the granules, I had to put each dose mixed into less than a teaspoon of food for each cat or kitten separately, and then force each one to completely eat their individual dose before I could put down the general food bowls.

The Panacur liquid is a lot easier to dose exactly, in my opinion. I just line up the cats, and dose each one in turn, according to their weight, then dotting their head with a small drop of the white fluid, so I know that they were dosed. Otherwise you can do the "door" routine, by putting all the undosed cats on your side of the door, dosing each one in turn, then thrusting each treated cat/kitten through the door immediately after dosing, so that only the cats/kittens on your side of the door are still yet to be dosed, and all cats/kittens on the other side of the door are already treated.

I hope this helps! When I think of the many fine people who helped me to learn the ropes of successful cat breeding and showing when I was newer, I am so grateful that they were there for me when I needed to learn something that helped my cats be healthy and safe.