



GIARDIASIS

What is giardiasis?

Giardia is a tiny parasite (germ) that causes giardiasis, a disease that causes diarrhea (loose stools).

Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can become infected with *Giardia*. However, those at greatest risk are:

- People in childcare settings
- People who are in close contact with someone who has the disease
- Travelers within areas that have poor sanitation
- People who have contact with feces (stools) during sexual activity
- Backpackers or campers who drink untreated water from springs, lakes, or rivers
- Swimmers who swallow water from swimming pools, hot tubs, splash pads, or untreated recreational water from springs, lakes, or rivers
- People who get their household water from a shallow well
- People with weakened immune systems
- People who have contact with infected animals or animal environments contaminated with feces (stools).

How is giardiasis spread?

You can get giardiasis if you swallow *Giardia* germs. *Giardia* spreads easily and can spread from person to person or through contaminated water, food, surfaces, or objects. The most common way people get sick is by swallowing contaminated drinking water or recreational water (for example, lakes, rivers, or pools).

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

People with *Giardia* may experience mild or severe diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating, and fatigue. Diarrhea may last several weeks or months and might cause weight loss. Fever is rare. However, some people infected with *Giardia* do not become ill. Many young children have no symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin one to two weeks after becoming infected.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Since *Giardia* germs are found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea (especially children in day care centers or people who handle food) should not go to school or work. However, they may return to school or work 24 hours after diarrhea stops. Anyone with *Giardia* should wash their hands each time after using the toilet.

Office of Infectious Disease Epidemiology
24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

Many prescription drugs are available to treat giardiasis. Although giardiasis can infect all people, infants and pregnant women may be more likely to experience dehydration from diarrhea caused by giardiasis. To prevent dehydration, infants and pregnant women should drink a lot of fluids while sick. Dehydration can be life-threatening for infants, so it is especially important for parents to talk to their health care providers about treatment options for their infants. Contact your health care provider for specific treatment recommendations.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of giardiasis?

- Carefully wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or handling dirty diapers.
- Properly dispose of sewage so water sources will not be infected.
- Do not drink water that has not been properly treated.
- When camping, treat drinking water by boiling or with “purification tablets” before drinking.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/>