



GIARDIASIS

What is GIARDIASIS?

Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite called *Giardia lamblia*. It is a common cause of diarrheal illness. Cases may occur sporadically, in clusters or outbreaks.

Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis, but it tends to occur more often in people in institutional settings, children in childcare centers, foreign travelers, and individuals who drink improperly treated surface water. Men who have sex with men may also be at increased risk of getting giardiasis.

How is this parasite spread?

The *Giardia* parasite is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. Hand-to-mouth transfer from contaminated body surfaces or objects, such as toys or diapering areas, also spreads the parasite. Person-to-person spread may occur in childcare centers where there is close contact between preschool children who have not yet learned good bathroom and hand washing habits.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

People exposed to *Giardia* may have mild to severe diarrhea, cramps, bloating, and gas. Some people with giardiasis will not have any symptoms. Occasionally, some will have diarrhea which lasts for several weeks or months, with significant weight loss.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear from 5-25 days after exposure, but usually within 7-10 days.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

People with diarrhea need to be excluded from childcare, food service or any other group activity where they may present a risk to others. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops. They should make sure to carefully wash their hands after using the bathroom, after diapering and before preparing food.

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

Several prescription drugs are available to treat giardiasis. However, some individuals may recover without medication. Patients with *Giardia* should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

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

- Carefully wash hands thoroughly after toilet visits or changing diapers and before preparing or eating foods.
- Carefully dispose of sewage wastes, so as not to contaminate surface or ground water.
- Avoid consuming improperly treated drinking water.