

## Giardiasis (*Giardia* infection)

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### What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal illness caused by a parasite, *Giardia intestinalis*. Once a person or animal has been infected with the parasite, it lives in their intestine and comes out in their bowel movements (stool). The parasite can survive for long periods outside the body and in the environment.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms normally begin 1 to 2 weeks (average 7 days) after becoming infected and may include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Greasy stools
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea

These symptoms may last 2-6 weeks and may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some infected people have no symptoms at all but can still spread the infection to others.

### How is it spread?

- When hands, food, water or objects (toys, etc.) become contaminated with infected stool and then gets into someone's mouth.
- Swallowing contaminated water (especially lakes, rivers, springs, streams, ponds, swimming pools, hot tubs).
- Drinking or making ice from contaminated water sources.
- Eating contaminated uncooked foods.
- Not washing hands after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- By exposure to human stool through sexual contact.

### Who gets *Giardia*?

Anyone can get *Giardia*. Those who travel internationally are more likely to develop infection. Infants, young children, the elderly, and those immunocompromised are at greater risk to develop serious complications.

### What should I do if I have symptoms?

- Contact your healthcare provider.

### How is *Giardia* diagnosed?

- By testing a stool sample.

### How is *Giardia* treated?

- Most people who have healthy immune systems will recover without treatment.

### How can I prevent the spread of *Giardia*?

- Do not drink or use ice made from untreated water.
- Do not swallow contaminated recreational water.
- Do not swim while you have diarrhea and for two weeks after your diarrhea stops. Chlorine in swimming water cannot kill the parasite.
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers need to sufficiently treat water and use good hygiene.
- Drink bottled or treated water when traveling.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits.
- Do not prepare food for others.
- Do not eat uncooked foods when traveling in countries with poor water sanitation unless you can boil, cook, or peel the food.
- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for 20 seconds:
  - After using the bathroom or changing diapers.
  - After touching animals or their stool.
  - Before eating or preparing food.
- Assist young children with hand washing.
- Properly dispose of dirty diapers.
- Avoid sexual practices that might result in oral exposure to stool.
- Do not send your child to daycare or preschool if he/she has diarrhea.
- Do not go to work if you are a health care worker, food handler, or day care worker.

### For further information visit:

- [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov)

**Report *Giardia* cases to Saint Louis County Department of Health by calling 314 615 1630**