

Giardiasis (*Giardia*)

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a disease caused by a parasite (*Giardia duodenalis*) that causes diarrhea. It can live in the intestines of people or animals and can be passed in the stool (poop) of an infected person or animal.

Who Usually Gets Giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis. People who are at most risk for serious illness from giardiasis include:

- child care workers
- children (especially diaper-aged) who attend daycare centers
- people who travel internationally (most often in areas that have poor sanitation)
- hikers, campers and others who drink or swallow water from contaminated sources without first boiling, filtering or disinfecting the water
- people who have weakened immune systems
- people who have contact with stool during sexual activity.

How is Giardiasis Spread?

The disease can be spread by:

- putting something in your mouth or accidentally swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of a person or animal infected with *Giardia*

- swallowing water from pools, hot tubs, fountains, rivers, lakes, springs, ponds or streams contaminated with sewage or stools from people and animals.
- eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*
- swallowing *Giardia* picked up from surfaces (toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails) contaminated with stool from an infected person or animal.

What are the Symptoms of Giardiasis?

Symptoms include diarrhea (loose or watery stools), gas, stomach cramps and upset stomach. Symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration (becoming dried out). Some people have no symptoms.

Symptoms usually begin 1 to 2 weeks after being infected. In healthy people, symptoms may last 2 to 6 weeks. Sometimes, symptoms can last longer.

How is Giardiasis Found?

Your health care provider will likely ask you for a stool sample to see if you are infected. Testing for giardia can be difficult so you may need to give several stool samples over several days.

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How is Giardiasis Treated?

There are several prescription medicines that can treat the infection. Talk with your health care provider to see what is right for you.

If you have a weakened immune system, talk with your health care provider.

A quick loss of fluids from diarrhea can be life-threatening in babies. Talk with your health care provider about how to treat a baby or young child.

There are antidiarrheal medicines that may work. Your health care provider can tell you if these are right for you or your child.

How Can You Prevent the Spread of Giardiasis?

- Wash your hands well with soap and water after using the toilet, before handling or eating food (especially for people who have diarrhea) and after every diaper change (even if you are wearing gloves).
- Do not go swimming if you have diarrhea. Do not let a young child with diarrhea and in diapers go in any swimming pool or other water that has other children.
- Do not swallow water that other people are in (pools, hot tubs, fountains, rivers, lakes, springs, ponds or streams).

- Avoid drinking untreated water from shallow wells, rivers, springs, ponds and streams.
- Avoid drinking untreated water during community-wide outbreaks of disease caused by contaminated drinking water.
- Avoid using ice or drinking untreated water when traveling in countries where the water supply may be unsafe.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Use uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw.
- Avoid eating uncooked foods when traveling in countries that have minimal water treatment and sanitation systems.
- Avoid exposure with stools or the rectum during sex.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.