

GIARDIASIS

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an intestinal or stomach illness caused by a microscopic organism called *Giardia lamblia*.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis infection?

People infected with *Giardia* may have mild or severe diarrhea. Symptoms may appear from 1 to 4 weeks after exposure but usually within 10 days. Fever is rarely present. In some instances, infected persons will have no symptoms at all. Sometimes, infected persons will have chronic diarrhea over several weeks or months, with significant weight loss.

How is *Giardia* spread?

Person-to-person transmission due to poor hand washing practices is probably the main way that *Giardia* parasites are spread, especially in day care centers and institutions. In addition, feces from an infected person or animal may “dirty” or contaminate water or food.

How long are people contagious?

Persons may continue to have *Giardia* in their stools (feces) from a few weeks to a few months. Treatment may shorten the time that people are contagious.

Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis, but it tends to occur more often in people in institutional settings or people in day care centers. Also, foreign travelers and individuals who consume improperly treated surface water (such as streams) are at higher risk for getting giardiasis.

What treatment is available for people with giardiasis?

Often your health care provider will give you medicine to treat giardiasis. Some individuals may recover on their own without medication. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Infected persons should not go to day care, or to jobs involving patient care or food handling. Most people may return to work or school when diarrhea stops. At all times, they should maintain good hand hygiene practices.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting giardiasis?

You can decrease your chance of coming in contact with *Giardia* with these practices:

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap, and especially after using the toilet, changing a diaper or before preparing and/or eating food. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Promptly clean contaminated surfaces with household chlorine bleach-based cleaners.
- Carefully dispose of sewage wastes so as not to contaminate surface or groundwater.
- Avoid food or water from sources that may be contaminated.