

Giardiasis General Information

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an illness caused by *Giardia lamblia*, a parasite that lives in the intestine of people and animals. The parasite is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal. The parasite is protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time.

Who can get giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis. Those at increased risk are:

- people in close contact with children or adults who have giardiasis
- children who attend childcare settings
- people who drink or accidentally swallow surface water that has not been properly treated [such as hikers, swimmers, and campers]

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include diarrhea, loose or watery stool, stomach cramps, and upset stomach. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people have no symptoms. It takes 1-4 weeks to get sick after being infected.

What is the treatment?

Several prescription drugs are available to treat giardiasis. Consult with your healthcare provider. Drink plenty of fluids while ill to avoid dehydration.

How can you prevent giardiasis?

Giardia is passed in the stool of humans and other wild animals and pets. *Giardia* can be shed in the stool for weeks to months, even if the person has no symptoms. *Giardia* may be found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals.

Ways to prevent the spread of *giardia* infection are:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet and before eating or handling food.
- Avoid swallowing recreational water [pools, hot tubs, lakes or rivers].
- Keep diapered children or anyone with diarrhea out of swimming pools.
- Avoid using ice or drinking untreated water when travelling in countries where the water supply might be unsafe.
- Use uncontaminated water to wash all vegetables and fruits before eating.