



Giardia Fact Sheet

What is Giardia?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal disease caused by the microscopic parasite *Giardia*. The parasite lives in the intestines and is passed in feces (poop). Once outside the body, *Giardia* can sometimes survive for weeks or months.

Who gets Giardia?

Anyone can get Giardia but children, especially those in childcare settings, have a higher likelihood of being exposed. Anyone who comes in contact with the parasite has the potential to become infected.

Where is Giardia found?

Giardia is found in infected people (who may or may not be ill) and in wild and domestic animals. Giardia is also found in various settings such as recreational waters like pools and lakes and streams which were contaminated with feces from infected humans or animals.

How is Giardia spread?

Giardia is passed in the feces of an infected person or animal. It can contaminate water or food. The disease can spread from person to person in day care centers or other settings where people do not wash their hands well properly.

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What are the symptoms of Giardia?

People with Giardia may experience mild or severe diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating and fatigue. Diarrhea may last several weeks or months and might cause weight loss. Fever is rare. Some people infected with Giardia do not become ill. Many young children have no symptoms. Children in daycare centers are often infected, but do not need treatment unless they get diarrhea.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Diarrhea usually begins within 10 days, but it can begin as early as 5 days or as late as 25 days after infection with Giardia.

How long can an infected person spread Giardia?

An infected person can spread Giardia for a few weeks to a few months. Treatment may shorten this length of time.

What is the treatment for Giardia?

Antibiotics are often prescribed by doctors to treat Giardia. However, some people may recover without treatment.

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Does everyone infected with Giardia need to be treated?

No. Testing and treatment of children who do not have symptoms is usually not necessary.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Since Giardia are found in the feces, people with diarrhea (especially children in day care centers or people who handle food) should not go to school or work. They may return when the diarrhea stops. Anyone with Giardia should wash their hands each time after using the toilet.

What can be done to stop the spread of Giardia?

- 1 Carefully wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or handling dirty diapers.
- 2 Do not drink water that has not been properly treated. When camping, treat drinking water by boiling or with “purification tablets” before drinking.
- 3 Do not go to school or work until diarrhea stops.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health
Department (405) 425-4437*

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