



Giardia Fact Sheet

What is Giardia?

Giardia is a gut infection caused by a parasite called Giardia lamblia. It is a common cause of diarrhea in the US. Over two hundred cases of giardiasis are reported each year in Oklahoma.

Who gets Giardia?

Anyone can get Giardia, but children are infected more often than adults. It occurs more often in people in hospitals, prisons or in daycare centers. Persons who travel overseas or who drink untreated water also have a better chance of getting Giardia.

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 lakes and streams which were contaminated with feces (stool) from infected humans or animals.

How is Giardia spread?

Giardia is passed in the feces of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. The disease can spread from person to person in day care centers or other settings where people sometimes don't wash their hands well enough. People who go camping or hunting can get Giardia by drinking untreated water.

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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. However, 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 persons may recover on their own 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 germs are found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea (especially children in day care centers or people who handle food) should not go to school or work; however, 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 Properly dispose of sewage so water sources will not be infected.
- 3 Do not drink water that has not been properly treated. When camping, treat drinking water by boiling or with “purification tablets” before drinking.

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

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