

Giardia

What is *Giardia*?

Giardia is a parasite that causes a stomach illness called giardiasis.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Symptoms normally begin 1 to 3 weeks (usually 7-10 days) after ingesting the *Giardia* parasite.

Symptoms include:

- Diarrhea and greasy stools
- Stomach cramping, bloating and passing gas
- Fatigue, loss of appetite and weight loss

Some people may experience symptoms periodically for weeks, months or longer.

How do I get giardiasis?

People who have become sick with giardiasis will have the parasite in their feces (poop). You must swallow or eat the *Giardia* parasite to become infected. Giardiasis is usually spread through the following:

- Drinking water or using ice made from water where *Giardia* may live (for example, water from lakes, streams, or wells)
- Swallowing water while swimming or playing in water where *Giardia* may live (especially in lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams)
- Drinking unsafe water while backpacking or hiking

- Contact with someone ill with giardiasis
- Exposure to feces (poop) through sexual contact
- Traveling to countries where giardiasis is common
- Eating uncooked foods that have *Giardia* organisms on them
- Contact with their pets when the pet is infected

Note: Giardiasis is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.



What is the treatment for giardiasis?

- Treatment with prescription medications can reduce the amount of time that a person has symptoms and is able to spread giardia.
- Without treatment, infected people can spread the parasite for weeks or months.

(over)

How do I prevent giardiasis?

- Do not drink water from streams, lakes, etc., unless it is boiled for at least three minutes or filtered. The filter label will tell you if it removes the *Giardia* parasite.
- Wash hands properly after using the restroom or changing a diaper, before handling food or objects that people put in their mouths (e.g., toys).
- Do not let animals lick your face.
- Prevent contact with feces (poop) during sex.
- Disinfect contaminated surfaces with 3/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water.



If you think you have giardiasis

- See your health care provider.
- Do not prepare food for others.
- If your job involves handling food, caring for small children or if you work in health care, do not go to work and contact your health care provider.
- Children who might have giardiasis should not go to child care settings – especially if they have diarrhea.
- Do not swim until you've stopped having diarrhea for at least 2 weeks.



Health Tip

Follow these steps to prevent illness:

- Do not drink untreated water unless it is boiled or treated with the correctly sized filter
- Wash hands frequently while hiking and camping
- Wash hands after going to the restroom, changing diapers, before eating and after touching or cleaning up after animals.

Why does the health department investigate giardiasis?

It is the responsibility of the local health department to investigate giardiasis in the community. The health department keeps track of how many people are getting the disease and works to limit the number of people who get sick.

