

# Giardia

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## What is *Giardia*?

*Giardia* is a parasite that causes an illness called giardiasis. This illness affects the stomach and intestines.

## How do I get giardiasis?

You must ingest (swallow or eat) the *Giardia* parasite to become infected. *Giardia* is usually spread through the following:

- *Giardia* parasites can be found in many surface waters (lakes, streams, etc.). Drinking from or swallowing water while playing in surface waters can cause you to become sick.
- People who have become infected with *Giardia* will have the parasite in their feces (stools). If people do not properly wash their hands after using the restroom or changing a diaper, and then handle food or objects that people put in their mouths (e.g., toys), they can spread the parasite to other people.
- Some infected people carry the *Giardia* parasite without ever having symptoms. People can spread the *Giardia* parasite even if they do not have symptoms.
- Pets can also be infected and can spread *Giardia* to you through their feces.
- *Giardia* is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.

## Symptoms

Symptoms begin 3-25 days (usually 7-10 days) after ingesting the *Giardia* parasite. Children are more prone to *Giardia* infection than adults. Symptoms include:

- Diarrhea and greasy stools (feces)
- Stomach cramping, bloating and passing gas
- Fatigue, loss of appetite and weight loss
- Some people may experience symptoms periodically for weeks or months.

## Prevention

- Never drink water from surface waters such as lakes, streams, etc. unless you have boiled or filtered it first. The filter label will tell you if it can remove *Giardia*.
- Wash your hands before preparing food or handling baby toys.
- Always wash your hands after using the restroom. You may have and spread the parasite even if you do not have any symptoms.
- Wash your hands and the child's hands after diapering or helping with toilet training.
- Wash hands after handling pets (or other animals) or cleaning up after animals.



### Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
  - Between fingers
  - Under fingernails
  - Back of hands
  - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

(continued on back)



**Tri-County Health  
Department**

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# *Giardia (continued)*

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## Treatment for giardiasis

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

### *If you think you have giardiasis:*

- See your health care provider.
- Do not prepare food for others.
- If your job involves handling food or caring for small children, 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.