

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by *Giardia*, a microscopic parasite that lives in the intestines of infected people and animals. The parasite is passed in stool (feces), and can survive outside of the body for long periods of time. *Giardia* is a common cause of diarrhea in the United States.

Who is at risk for giardiasis?

People of all ages can get giardiasis.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Giardiasis can cause a variety of symptoms, including diarrhea, greasy stools that tend to float, stomach or abdominal cramps, upset stomach or nausea, bloating, gas, weakness, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Some people will have no symptoms at all.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of giardiasis usually appear one to three weeks after becoming infected.

How is giardiasis spread?

Giardiasis is often spread by accidentally putting something in your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with feces of a person or animal infected with *Giardia*. The parasites have been found in the stool of many animals, including rodents, dogs, cats, cattle, and wild animals. Some animals may show symptoms of diarrheal illness if they are infected, but others have no symptoms at all.

You can get giardiasis from swallowing *Giardia* picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom handles, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) that contain stool from an infected person or animal, drinking water or using ice made from water sources where *Giardia* may live (such as untreated water from lakes, streams or wells), eating uncooked food that contains *Giardia* organisms, having contact with someone who is ill with giardiasis, or traveling to countries where giardiasis is common.

Swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Giardia* – including water in swimming pools, hot tubs, splash parks, lakes, or rivers – is also a common source of giardiasis. Avoid swallowing water when swimming in recreational water, and avoid swimming while experiencing diarrhea if diagnosed with *Giardia*.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

A person who is infected with *Giardia* can spread the disease during the entire period of infection, which can be anywhere from weeks to months in untreated people. Medications can help decrease the length of infection.

How is a person diagnosed?

Laboratory testing can identify *Giardia* in a stool specimen.

What is the treatment?

Several prescription medications are available to treat giardiasis.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have giardiasis?

A child should be excluded from child care if he/she has:

- Vomited two or more times within the previous 24 hours, unless the vomiting is determined to be caused by a noninfectious condition and the child is not in danger of dehydration
- Diarrhea, if stool is not contained in the diaper or if diarrhea frequency exceeds two or more stools above normal for that child
- A fever or is unable to participate and the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group

A child or an adult should be excluded from school or work if diarrhea cannot be contained. An adult who prepares or handles food should be excluded from work until 24 hours after diarrhea resolves or they provide written medical documentation from a health practitioner that they are not contagious.

What can be done to prevent the spread of giardiasis?

Person-to-person transmission of giardiasis can be prevented by thorough hand washing with water and soap and good personal hygiene. You should avoid swallowing water when swimming in recreational water. Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea and for up to two weeks after diarrhea has stopped. Do not drink untreated water from lakes, rivers, springs, streams, ponds, or shallow wells. Avoid eating raw or uncooked foods when traveling in countries with poor food and water treatment.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Giardia intestinalis Infections]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 353-355.
3. Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th Edition*. Giardiasis. American Public Health Association. 2015: 234-236.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Giardia. www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/.
5. North Dakota Administrative Code. (2016). 33-33-04-28.9-11. www.legis.nd.gov/information/acdata/pdf/33-33-04.pdf.