

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is the name of the illness caused by the organism *Giardia lamblia*, a type of protozoa. It is a common cause of diarrhea in the U.S. A total of 166 cases of giardiasis were reported in 2004.

Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis, but children are infected more often than adults. It occurs more often in people in hospitals, prisons, or in day care centers. Persons who travel overseas or who drink untreated water also increase their chances of getting giardiasis.

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 that were contaminated with feces (stool) from infected humans or animals.

How is giardiasis spread?

Giardia organisms are passed in the feces of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. The disease spreads most easily in group settings when people do not have access to hand washing facilities, or do not wash their hands well enough. People who go camping or hunting can get giardiasis by drinking untreated water.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

People with giardiasis may experience mild or severe diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating, and fatigue. Diarrhea may last several weeks or months and can cause weight loss. People rarely experience a fever with giardiasis. Some people infected with *Giardia* do not become ill. Many young children have no symptoms. Children in day care centers are often infected and serve as a source for others, but do not need treatment unless they get diarrhea.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Diarrhea usually begins within ten days, but it can begin as early as three 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*?

Anti-protozoal drugs such as furoxone (furazolidone) or flagyl (metronidazole) are often prescribed by doctors to treat giardiasis.

Does everyone infected with *Giardia* need to be treated?

People who are infected with *Giardia* but do not have symptoms do not usually need treatment. People who have symptoms of giardiasis and have had positive laboratory work for the disease should discuss treatment options with their health care provider.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

Since *Giardia* organisms are found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea should not go to school or work. It is especially important that children in day care centers or people who handle food should not go to school or work until their diarrhea stops. Anyone with giardiasis should wash their hands each time after using the toilet.

What can be done to stop the spread of giardiasis?

1. Always wash hands before preparing food and before eating.
2. Thoroughly wash hands after using the toilet or handling dirty diapers.
3. Properly dispose of sewage so water sources will not be infected.
4. Do not drink water that has not been properly treated. When camping, treat your drinking water by boiling. If boiling is not possible, two to four drops of household bleach may be added to each liter of water. If allowed to stand for 20 minutes, water treated in this way is an acceptable emergency alternative to boiling.

