

# Giardiasis

## Giardia Infection



### What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis (GEE-are-DYE-uh-sis) is a diarrheal illness caused by a microscopic parasite. Once a person or animal has been infected with *Giardia*, the parasite lives in the intestine and is passed in feces (stool). Because the parasite is protected by an outer shell, it can survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time.

### Who gets giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis. Persons more likely to become infected include:

- Children in child care settings, close contacts (such as those in the same family or in the same household or child care setting) or caregivers of infected people.
- People who drink water or use ice made from contaminated sources (e.g., lakes, streams, shallow or poorly monitored or maintained wells). Contaminated water may include water that has not been boiled, filtered, or disinfected with chemicals.
- People who swallow contaminated water while swimming, especially in lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams. Several community-wide outbreaks have been linked to recreational water or drinking water contaminated with *Giardia*.
- International travelers.

### How is giardiasis spread?

Giardiasis is commonly spread person to person when the ill person does not adequately wash their hands after using the toilet and then contaminates another person's food or drink. Giardiasis can also spread when people are exposed to human feces through sexual contact. Lastly, *giardia* is sometimes found on surfaces or in soil contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals.

### When and for how long is a person able to spread giardiasis?

A person can spread giardiasis as long as organisms are in the stool.

### What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

*Giardia* infection can cause a variety of intestinal signs or symptoms, which include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas or flatulence
- Greasy or fatty looking stools
- Stomach or abdominal cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea

These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with *giardia* infection have no symptoms at all.

### How soon after an infection do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin 3 days to 4 weeks (average 7-10 days) after becoming infected.

### Does the infection of giardiasis make a person immune?

No. It is possible to contract giardiasis multiple times.

### What are the complications associated with giardiasis?

*Giardia* infection can cause lingering symptoms and complications, especially in infants and children under 5. The most common complications include:

- **Dehydration.** Often a result of severe diarrhea, dehydration occurs when the body doesn't have enough water to carry out its normal functions.
- **Failure to thrive.** Chronic diarrhea from *giardia* infection can lead to malnutrition and harm a child's physical and mental development.
- **Lactose intolerance.** Many people with *giardia* infection develop lactose intolerance — the inability to properly digest milk sugar. The problem may persist long after the infection has cleared, leading to weight loss in some people.

### Is there a vaccine for giardiasis?

There is no vaccine to protect against giardiasis.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of giardiasis?

**Transmission can often be prevented by regular and thorough hand washing.**

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.
  - After using the toilet and before handling or eating food, especially if ill with diarrhea.
  - After changing a diaper or assisting with toileting, even if you are wearing gloves.
  - After touching something that could be contaminated (such as a trash can, cleaning cloth, drain, or soil).
  - After handling animals or their toys, leashes, or feces.
- Assist or visually supervise young children and others who may need help with hand washing as needed.

### **Practice safe swimming.**

- Protect others by not swimming if you are ill with diarrhea and for 1 week after your diarrhea stops. It is especially important that children in diapers do not swim for 1 week after they have had diarrhea.
- Shower with soap and water before entering recreational water. Thoroughly wash a child's bottom with soap and water after they use the toilet or have a diaper change, and before they enter the water.
- Keep *giardia* and other germs out of pools, hot tubs, lakes, rivers, the ocean, etc. by taking the following steps:
  - Take children to the bathroom frequently or check their diapers often.
  - Change diapers in the bathroom or a diaper-changing area.

### **Avoid drinking water that might be contaminated.**

- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams.
- Do not swallow recreational water. For more information on recreational water-related illness, visit [CDC's Healthy Swimming website](http://www.cdc.gov/healthy-swimming).
- Do not drink untreated water or use ice made from untreated water during community-wide outbreaks of disease caused by contaminated drinking water.
- Do not drink untreated water or use ice made from untreated drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe.

## Is there a treatment for giardiasis?

*Giardia* infection can be treated by a number of prescription medications.

## For more information:

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