

GIARDIA FACT SHEET

What is *Giardia*?

Giardia is a microscopic parasite that causes an intestinal illness known as giardiasis. A parasite is an organism that feeds off of another organism in order to survive. *Giardia* is found on surfaces or in soil, food, or water that has been contaminated with feces from infected humans or animals. The illness caused by these parasites is known as giardiasis.

Who can get giardiasis?

Anyone. However, persons more likely to get giardiasis include children in childcare centers, persons who travel internationally, persons who drink untreated or improperly treated surface water (such as hikers and campers), persons who care for someone with giardiasis, and persons who swallow water while swimming or playing in recreational water where *Giardia* may live (such as lakes, streams, and ponds). Persons exposed to feces through sexual contact are also more likely to become infected.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Symptoms of giardiasis include diarrhea, gas or flatulence, greasy stool that can float, stomach or abdominal cramps, and nausea or an upset stomach. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with giardiasis may have no symptoms at all.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally begin 1–3 weeks after becoming infected.

How does *Giardia* spread?

The parasite is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water, food, or surfaces. It can spread by putting something in your mouth or swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of an infected person or animal, by swallowing recreational water such as swimming pool water, water

from hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams where *Giardia* may live, by eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*, or by touching contaminated surfaces and objects such as toys, bathroom handles, changing tables, and putting your hands in your mouth without washing them.

How is giardiasis treated?

Most people with giardiasis will recover within 2–6 weeks. There are several prescription medications available to treat giardiasis. Infants and pregnant women may be more likely to experience dehydration from diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids while ill.

How can people protect themselves against giardiasis?

The following steps will decrease your risk of becoming infected or spreading this infection:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds
- Do not swallow water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, or pools
- If children have diarrhea
 - Keep them out of recreational waters (such as swimming pools)
 - Keep them home from childcare centers until the diarrhea has stopped
- Do not drink untreated water or poorly treated water
- Do not eat raw or uncooked foods when traveling in countries with poor food and water treatment
- Clean and disinfect areas contaminated by ill people or pets

Where can I get more information?

Information about *Giardia* and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.