



GIARDIASIS

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis (GEE-are-DYE-uh-sis) is a diarrheal illness caused by a one-celled, microscopic parasite. In the United States, *giardia* is a common cause of waterborne (drinking/ recreational) and occasional foodborne illness in humans. It is more common between July and October in younger children.

What are the symptoms?

Infection with *giardia* can lead to a variety of symptoms such as diarrhea, gas, greasy stool, stomach cramping, nausea, weight loss, and dehydration. Some people with giardiasis have no symptoms.

Symptoms will usually appear 1 to 2 weeks after ingestion or swallowing of *Giardia* **cysts** (the infective stage of the organism). They may last 2 to 6 weeks in otherwise healthy persons, but there are cases of chronic illnesses lasting months or even years. It is not unusual for symptoms to improve then worsen throughout the course of the illness.

How is giardiasis spread?

Giardia grows in the small intestine of infected humans and animals, such as dogs, cats, birds and beaver. Contamination of soil, food, water, and other surfaces can easily occur. People can become infected directly (unclean hand-to-mouth) or indirectly (swallowing contaminated food or water). In fact, the most common way to become infected is by swallowing contaminated water. *Giardia* parasites are found in lakes, ponds, rivers, wells, swimming pools, water parks, and spas. Ground and surface water can become contaminated from agricultural runoff, wastewater discharge, or animal feces. Children in diapers and people with diarrhea may accidentally contaminate pools and spas.

The risk of humans acquiring *Giardia* infection from dogs or cats is small. The exact type of *Giardia* that infects humans is usually not the same type that infects dogs and cats.

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

Usually, children or adults who have no symptoms need no treatment. Metronidazole (Flagyl) is the primary drug of choice. However, there are several other prescription medications that are effective. Over-the-counter medications, such as Pepto-Bismol or Kaopectate, should only be used with recommendations of a physician. It is important to avoid self-treatment of any diarrheal illness. Without proper treatment (if your physician prescribes it), a person capable of can shed the germ in their stool for long periods of time.

How can giardiasis be prevented?

Anyone can get *giardia*. Those persons at greatest risk include: child care workers, children who attend day care centers (especially those in diapers), international travelers, hikers, campers, swimmers and others who drink or accidentally swallow water from contaminated sources.

TIPS FOR PREVENTION

- Avoid swallowing recreational water or drinking untreated water. Water sources include: swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, streams, and shallow wells.
- Always wash hands after contact with farm animals, pets, animal feces, and animal environments.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food. Alcohol-based products are convenient and effective but do not replace the need for frequent use of soap and water.
- Avoid swimming in recreational water if you have *giardia* and for **at least 2 weeks** after the diarrhea stops. Remember - you can pass *giardia* in your stool and contaminate water for several weeks after your symptoms have stopped.
- Dispose of soiled diapers properly in a container with a lid. Make sure that you wash your hands and the hands of the infant or toddler with soap and water.
- Clean toys and other surfaces that have the possibility of being contaminated such as bathroom fixtures, doorknobs, and changing tables. Use cleaning wipes or diluted bleach solution (1/4 cup to 1-gallon water). Make new homemade bleach solution daily.
- Do not use ice or drink water while traveling in countries where here the water supply may not be safe.
- Do not eat uncooked food when traveling in countries without safe water treatment and sanitation systems.
- Always- rinse all vegetables and fruits with fresh (uncontaminated) water.
- Be a good teacher and role model to others!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

SCHD Communicable Disease Unit 330-375-2662
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov
Mayo Clinic www.mayoclinic.com
Minnesota Department of Health www.health.state.mn.us