GIARDIASIS

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis (GEE-are-DYE-uh-sis) is a diarrheal illness. In the United States, *giardia* is a common cause of waterborne (drinking and recreational) illness in humans. It is more common between July and October in children under the age of 5.

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.

The usual time from exposure to the onset of symptoms can be 3 to 25 days (usually 7 to 10). In generally healthy persons, symptoms can last 2 to 6 weeks, but sometimes longer. 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.

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

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 after the evaluation and recommendation of a physician. It is important to avoid self-treatment of any diarrheal illness. Without proper treatment, a person capable of can shed the germ in their stool, often for months.

How can giardiasis be prevented?

Anyone can get g*iardia*. 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 your wash your hands <u>and</u> 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!