



Prevent • Promote • Protect

Public Health Fact Sheet

Giardia

What is Giardia?

- Giardia is a parasite that causes infection of the intestines.

What are the symptoms of Giardia infection?

- People infected with Giardia can develop diarrhea, abdominal cramps, bloating and gas. Symptoms usually begin one to two weeks after exposure. Symptoms can last for several weeks to months and lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with Giardia infection have no symptoms at all.

How is Giardia infection spread?

- Giardia is found in the stool of infected humans, wild animals and pets.
- Giardia spreads when hands, food, or water become contaminated with the stool of an infected person. This happens when infected people do not wash their hands thoroughly after using the bathroom or from having contact with ill people.
- People with Giardia infection who go swimming when they have diarrhea can contaminate recreational water such as lakes or rivers, as well as swimming pools that are not properly maintained. Animals with Giardia infection also can contaminate water. Giardia infection can come from swallowing contaminated water.
- Travelers to countries where Giardia is common can get infected as described above.

What should I do if I think I have Giardia infection?

- Contact your doctor or health care provider.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the bathroom.
- Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea and for at least one week after your diarrhea resolves. This is essential for children in diapers.
- Do not send your children to child care or preschool if they have diarrhea.

How is Giardia infection diagnosed?

- Many different illnesses can cause diarrhea or abdominal cramps. Laboratory testing of stool is necessary to diagnose Giardia infection.

How is Giardia infection treated?

- Most people with mild Giardia infection get better on their own.
- Medication prescribed by your doctor may shorten the illness.

How do you prevent Giardia infection?

- Hand washing is the most important way to prevent infection. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water:
 - After using the bathroom
 - After changing diapers
 - After touching any stool-soiled material
 - Before handling food or drink, and before eating
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams.
- Do not drink untreated water or use ice made from untreated drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe.
- Maintain swimming pools through adequate disinfection and filtration.

More information on Giardia: www.cdc.gov/DiseasesConditions/

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