

## Giardiasis

### What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal disease caused by the microscopic parasite *Giardia duodenalis* (or “*Giardia*” for short). Once a person or animal has been infected with *Giardia*, the parasite lives in the intestines and is passed in stool (poop). Once outside the body, *Giardia* can sometimes survive for weeks or even months.

### How do you get Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is spread when a person swallows the *Giardia* parasite. This can happen by:

- Swallowing unsafe food or water contaminated with *Giardia*
- Having close contact with someone who has giardiasis, particularly in childcare settings
- Traveling within areas that have poor sanitation
- Exposure to poop through sexual contact from someone who is sick or recently sick with *Giardia*
- Transferring *Giardia* germs picked up from contaminated surfaces (such as bathroom handles, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) into your mouth
- Having contact with infected animals or animal environments contaminated with poop

### Who can get Giardiasis?

Anyone can get Giardiasis. Giardiasis is more commonly seen in:

- People in childcare settings
- People who are in close contact with someone who has the disease
- Travelers within areas that have poor sanitation
- People who have contact with poop during sexual activity
- Backpackers or campers who drink untreated water from springs, lakes, or rivers
- Swimmers who swallow water from swimming pools, hot tubs, splash pads, or untreated recreational water from springs, lakes, or rivers
- People who get their household water from a shallow well
- People with weakened immune systems
- People who have contact with infected animals or animal environments contaminated with poop



### What are the symptoms?

- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Foul-smelling, greasy poop that can float
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Upset stomach or nausea
- Dehydration

Symptoms can begin 1 to 2 weeks after becoming infected. Symptoms can last from 2 to 6 weeks. Some people with Giardiasis do not have any symptoms.

## What can I do to prevent Giardiasis?

- Wash your hands with soap and water during key times, especially:
  - Before preparing food or eating.
  - After using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Avoid eating food and drinking water that might be contaminated with Giardia germs.
  - Properly treat water from springs, lakes, or rivers (surface water) while backpacking or camping if no other source of safe water is available.
  - Avoid swallowing water from swimming pools, hot tubs, splash pads, and untreated water from springs, lakes, or rivers (surface water) while swimming.
  - Store, clean, and prepare fruits and vegetables properly.
- Practice safe sex by reducing your contact with poop during sex or avoid having sex several weeks after you or your partner have recovered from giardiasis.



## How is Giardiasis diagnosed?

Contact your healthcare provider if you think you may have giardiasis. Your healthcare provider will ask you to submit stool (poop) samples to see if you are infected. Because it can be difficult to detect Giardia, you may be asked to submit several stool specimens collected over several days to see if you are infected.

## How are Giardiasis treated?

Many prescription drugs are available to treat giardiasis. Although Giardia can infect all people, infants and pregnant women may be more likely to experience dehydration from the diarrhea caused by giardiasis. To prevent dehydration, infants and pregnant women should drink a lot of fluids while sick. Dehydration can be life-threatening for infants, so it is especially important that parents talk to their healthcare providers about treatment options for their infants.

## For more information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/index.html> or call Huron County Public Health at 419-668-1652 ext. 269.