

Giardiasis

Beaver Fever

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What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a parasite. It is a common cause of diarrheal disease. Cases may occur sporadically or as an outbreak.

Who gets Giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis but it tends to occur more often in people in institutional settings, day care centers, foreign travelers, hikers, campers, and individuals who drink improperly treated surface water. Homosexual males may also be at increased risk of contracting giardiasis during sexual activity. Immunocompromised individuals may be at risk for more severe or prolonged illness.

What are the symptoms of Giardiasis?

The symptoms of giardiasis include diarrhea, loose or watery stool, stomach cramps, bloating, and upset stomach. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Fever is rarely present. Some people may have no symptoms.

How is Giardiasis spread??

The giardia parasite is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. It can be spread by putting something in your mouth or swallowing something that has come in contact with the stool of a person or animal infected with Giardia; by swallowing recreational water such as swimming pool water, water from hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans and animals; by eating uncooked food contaminated with Giardia; by touching a surface contaminated with giardia such as toys, bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, etc. and putting your hands in your mouth without washing them.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally begin within 7 to 10 days after being infected but can take as long as 4 weeks to occur.

Where are the Giardia parasites found?

The parasite is found in every region of the United States and throughout the world.

FACTSHEET

Is a person with Giardia contagious?

Yes, the person is contagious for at least two weeks after the diarrhea and symptoms stop.

How is Giardiasis treated?

Antibiotics may be prescribed by doctors to treat giardiasis. However, some individuals may recover on their own without medication.

Should a person with Giardiasis be excluded from work or school?

People with active diarrhea who are unable to control their bowel movements (infants, young children, certain handicapped individuals, etc.) may need to be excluded from settings such as day care or group activities where they may present a risk to others. After they have been treated and have recovered, they may be permitted to return. Individuals who are not in high-risk settings may return to their routine activities when they have recovered, provided that they carefully wash their hands after each toilet visit.

Can Giardiasis be prevented?

Yes. The following steps will decrease your risk of contracting or spreading giardiasis:

- Frequent hand washing especially before preparing food or beverages and after using the bathroom
- Carefully dispose of sewage wastes so as not to contaminate surface, ground water or wells
- Avoid swallowing recreational water
- Keep children with diarrhea out of recreational waters (swimming pools)
- Avoid consuming improperly treated drinking water

Want more information?

Information about Giardiasis and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call 202-442-9371.

