

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## GIARDIASIS

Giardiasis is an illness caused by *Giardia lamblia*, a parasite that lives in the intestines of people and animals. It is one of the most common causes of waterborne disease in the United States.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin 1 to 2 weeks after becoming infected. They may include:

- Watery, foul-smelling diarrhea. Sometimes the stool (poop) is greasy and floats. Episodes of diarrhea may also alternate with constipation.
- Gas
- Lack of appetite
- Stomach cramps
- Fever, nausea, vomiting and headache may occur
- Some people may have Giardia but have no symptoms. The illness usually lasts about 2 to 6 weeks.

### Transmission

- The parasite can be found naturally in some lakes, streams, and wells. People who drink this water may swallow the parasite and become infected. Hikers and campers may be at risk if they drink this water.
- Once a person or animal has been infected with Giardia, the parasite lives in the intestine and can leave the body in the stool (poop). Anything that comes into contact with feces (poop) from infected humans or animals can become contaminated with the Giardia parasite.
- People can become sick by accidentally swallowing Giardia picked up from contaminated surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) or hands. Children in child care settings, especially diaper-aged children are at risk for giardiasis for this reason.
- Giardiasis is more common in some countries, especially those that don't have good public systems of water treatment and sanitation. Travelers to these places are at greater risk of getting giardiasis.
- People can also get giardiasis if they are exposed to human feces (poop) through sexual contact.

### Treatment

- Your health care provider will ask you to submit stool (poop) samples to see if you are infected. Because testing for Giardia can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several specimens over several days.
- Prescription medicines are available to treat people with giardiasis. Usually, only people with symptoms need to be treated; unless they attend child care or work in an occupation where they could spread Giardia to other people.

### Prevention

- Wash hands well after going to the bathroom, after changing diapers, before preparing meals and before eating. Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent spread of disease.
- Clean contaminated areas (potty chairs, toilets, diapering areas) with soap and water, and then disinfect with a commercial disinfectant spray or with a bleach solution. Let air-dry.
- Do not drink untreated water from lakes, streams, or rivers. Well water could also carry giardia. If you think your family may be sick from well water, consider having your well tested.

### Additional Information

People with giardiasis who attend a child care center or who work in food service, patient care, or child care should stay home until the diarrhea is gone and they have taken appropriate antibiotics for 72 hours.

**All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.**



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