

***Giardia* Infection**

Giardiasis (GEE-are-DYE-uh-sis)

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis (GEE-are-DYE-uh-sis) is a diarrheal illness caused by a one-celled, microscopic parasite, *Giardia intestinalis* (also known as *Giardia lamblia*). Once an animal or person has been infected with *Giardia intestinalis*, the parasite lives in the intestine and is passed in the stool. Because the parasite is protected by an outer shell, it can survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time.

During the past 2 decades, *Giardia* infection has become recognized as one of the most common causes of waterborne disease (found in both drinking and recreational water) in humans in the United States. *Giardia* are found worldwide and within every region of the United States.

How do you get giardiasis and how is it spread?

The *Giardia* parasite lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of germs can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal. *Giardia* is found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. You **can** become infected after accidentally swallowing the parasite; you **cannot** become infected through contact with blood. *Giardia* can be spread by:

- Accidentally putting something into your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with feces of a person or animal infected with *Giardia*.
- Swallowing recreational water contaminated with *Giardia*. Recreational water includes water in swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, or streams that can be contaminated with sewage or feces from humans or animals.
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*.
- Accidentally swallowing *Giardia* picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) contaminated with feces from an infected person.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Giardia infection can cause a variety of intestinal symptoms, which include

- Diarrhea
- Gas or flatulence
- Greasy stools that tend to float
- Stomach cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea.

These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with giardiasis have no symptoms at all.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin 1 to 2 weeks (average 7 days) after becoming infected.