

GIARDIASIS

What is Giardiasis?

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

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 or abdominal cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea

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

How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Giardiasis?

- Practice good hygiene
- Avoid contaminated water and food

How Do People Get Giardiasis?

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 on surfaces or in soil, food, or water that has 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 swallowing Giardia picked up from surfaces contaminated with feces from an infected person or animal
- Drinking water or using ice made from contaminated sources
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with Giardia
- Having contact with someone who is ill with Giardiasis
- Traveling to countries where Giardiasis is common and being exposed to the parasite as described in the bullets above

Diagnosis and Treatment of Giardiasis

Your health care provider will likely ask you to submit stool samples to check for the parasite.

Several prescription drugs are available to treat Giardia infection. Young children and pregnant women might be more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should, therefore, drink plenty of fluids while ill.



For more information, contact a
Public Health Nurse at the
City-County Health Department at
454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org
or www.cdc.gov