

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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Giardia

What is Giardia?

Giardia is a diarrheal illness caused by a bug (parasite) called *Giardia intestinalis*. The parasite can be found in contaminated water sources such as lakes and ponds. It can also be spread from direct person to person contact.

Who can get Giardia?

Anyone can get Giardia, however children in childcare settings and those in close contact with infected people are more likely to become infected. People who drink water or use ice made from contaminated sources (lakes, ponds, etc.) are also at risk.

What are the symptoms of Giardia?

Symptoms of Giardia normally begin 1 – 2 weeks after becoming infected. A person with this disease may have:

- diarrhea - often yellow, frothy and smells worse than usual
- gas or bloating
- stomach aches
- vomiting
- little or no appetite
- fever
- headache

Signs may come and go. Some people may have Giardia with no symptoms at all.

How is Giardia spread?

The Giardia parasite lives in the intestine of infected people and animals (cats, dogs, cattle, deer and beavers). The parasite forms cysts that are passed out of the body with the bowel movement. These cysts can infect others who come in contact. Giardia is found on surfaces and in contaminated soil, food and water. Prompt and proper treatment will help stop the spread of Giardia to others and will speed up your cure.

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

The only way to find out if you have this disease is to see your doctor. The doctor may ask you to bring a sample of your stool to be checked for Giardia. If you have this disease the doctor will give prescribe medicine to take. Make sure that you take all of the medicine. **DO NOT STOP TAKING THE MEDICINE EVEN IF YOU FEEL BETTER.** Check back with your doctor after the medicine is gone to make sure that you are cured. If you or anyone in you family is diagnosed with this disease, **ALL** members of the family should be checked by your doctor for Giardia. **Make sure that ALL members of your family wash their hands after having bowel movements or changing soiled diapers.**

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How can Giardia be prevented?

- If your child has Giardia your doctor may tell you to keep your child away from other children until the infection clears.
- Do not swim if you are experiencing diarrhea and for 1 week after diarrhea stops. This is especially important for children.
- Infected food service, patient care, or day care workers should be off work until they are no longer infected.
- Wash all clothing, sheets, and diapers soiled by a person who has Giardia in hot soapy water. Dry these items in clothes dryer.
- Wrap disposable dirty diapers so that they are completely covered. Put them in a plastic bag and then in garbage can with a tight lid. Wash your hands after handling soiled diapers.
- Children's toys and the floors they crawl on should be kept clean to avoid spreading Giardia. Wash hard surfaces, toys and play surfaces with hot soapy water, rinse with hot water, and disinfect with bleach and water solution: Use a freshly prepared 1:100 dilution of common household bleach; approximately 2 teaspoons per 1 quart (4 cups) of water. Apply bleach solution and let air dry.
- Cook meat well before eating it. Put cooked meat into the refrigerator right after a meal. Don't leave it on the counter to cool off.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, ponds, rivers and streams.
- Scrub cutting boards, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after contact with raw meat, poultry or eggs.
- Wash your hands and your children's hands after using the bathroom, after changing diapers, before eating, before and after making food, and after playing with animals.
- Children should not handle baby chicks or other young birds.
- Reptiles are not appropriate pets for small children and should not be in the same house as an infant.

Are there complications?

In some cases the diarrhea and vomiting can cause the body to lose a lot of fluids. This dehydration (loss of water) can be a problem for small children, infants, pregnant women or for the elderly. It is important to drink plenty of fluids while ill.

For more information on Giardia, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

For additional copies, visit our website at www.oakgov.com/health.