



# Giardiasis

## What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an infection caused by microscopic parasites called Giardia. These parasites are found worldwide, including in New Brunswick. The parasites live in the intestines of infected people and animals like beavers and muskrat. The parasites cause gastrointestinal illness and are passed in the feces. Giardia parasites are a common cause of diarrhea.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually appear within one to two weeks after a person becomes infected with the parasite. People who become ill have frequent loose and pale greasy stools, stomach cramps, nausea, gas, bloating, weight loss, and fatigue. Symptoms usually last for two to six weeks, but occasionally can last longer. Some persons who are infected may not have any symptoms but can still spread the parasite.

## How is Giardiasis spread?

Giardia parasites are passed in the feces of infected people and animals. The parasites can be found in soil, food, water or on surfaces contaminated with feces. The parasites are spread by person-to-person contact, by animal-to-person contact, by eating contaminated food, or drinking contaminated water. Giardia parasites are protected by an outer shell that allows it to survive outside the body for long periods of time so boil or filter untreated water that is used for drinking. Most cases are associated with drinking untreated or improperly treated water.

Examples of how the parasites can be spread are:

- Drinking untreated water from lakes or streams contaminated with animal feces;
- Swallowing contaminated water while swimming in lakes, streams, swimming pools and hot tubs;
- Contact with the feces of an infected person. For example, during diaper changing or when providing care.

## How is Giardiasis diagnosed?

Diagnosis of infection is based on assessment of clinical symptoms by a health care provider and laboratory testing of a stool sample however sometimes multiple samples may be needed.

## Who is at risk of Giardiasis?

Anyone exposed to the parasite can become infected. Young children, the elderly, and persons with weakened immune systems are at greater risk for more serious disease.

## A-Z DISEASE FACT SHEETS

### How can Giardiasis be prevented?

**Use good environmental management.** Flush or discard any stool in the toilet and clean surrounding area using hot water and detergent. A chlorine-based disinfectant is recommended.

**Practice good personal hygiene.** Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the toilet or changing a diaper; after handling animals or contact with animal feces; after handling raw meats; and before preparing or eating food.

**Take food safety precautions.** Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Thoroughly cook all meats (meat, poultry and seafood). Prevent contact of cooked foods with raw poultry and other meat. Drink and eat only pasteurized dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream).

**Drink properly treated water.** Avoid swallowing recreational waters from swimming pools and hot tubs. Do not drink untreated surface water from lakes or streams. Boiling your water for 1 minute will kill all known pathogens like cryptosporidium or E. coli. Test your private well drinking water twice per year for presence of bacteria. An E. coli bacteria test is used as an indicator for fecal contamination in drinking water.

### How is Giardiasis treated?

Persons with diarrhea should; drink plenty of liquids to avoid dehydration, stay home when ill; and practice good personal hygiene like hand washing. Avoid preparing food for others while you have symptoms and for 48 hours after you recover. Consult your healthcare provider for advice and treatment. Giardiasis may be treated with antibiotics to reduce duration of symptoms and further transmission.

### What is the public health response?

Health care providers and laboratories are required to confidentially notify cases to Public Health. Public Health staff may investigate to find out how the infection occurred, identify other people who may be at risk of infection, implement control measures, and provide advice as necessary; including exclusion of infected workers in high-risk occupations like persons involved in food handling, direct patient care, and care of the young (daycare) or the elderly (institutional settings).

### Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, local Public Health office or Tele-Care 811.

### USEFUL WEBSITES

Public Health Agency of Canada

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/>

Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca>

# A-Z DISEASE FACT SHEETS

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