

Giardia

Q. What is *Giardia*?

A microbiological organism, called a parasite, typically found in surface water or contaminated shallow ground water, which comes from human and animal fecal waste sources. *Giardia* is also found in soil, contaminated food, and surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from an infected human.

Q. What is Giardiasis?

A diarrheal illness caused by *Giardia*. The *Giardia* parasite can live in the human intestine once infected and is passed from the body in the stool. The parasite is protected by an outer shell, allowing it to survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time. Millions of “germs” can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal.

Q. How can Giardiasis be spread?

The illness caused by *Giardia* can be spread by accidentally putting something into your mouth or swallowing something that has come into contact with an infected human.

- Swallowing recreational water, including water in swimming pools, hot tubs, jacuzzis, fountains, lakes, rivers, ponds that have been 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.

Q. Who is most likely to get Giardiasis?

Anyone can get giardiasis. Persons more likely to become infected include:

- Children who attend day care centers, including diaper-aged children
- Child care workers
- Parents of infected children
- People who swallow water from contaminated sources
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- Swimmers who swallow water while swimming in lakes, rivers, ponds, and streams
- People who drink from shallow wells

Q. How is a *Giardia* infection diagnosed?

Your health care provider will likely ask you to submit stool samples to check for the parasite. Because *Giardia* can be difficult to diagnose, your provider may ask you to submit several stool specimens over several days.

Q. If I have been diagnosed with giardiasis, should I worry about spreading the infection to others?

Yes, a *Giardia* infection can be very contagious. Follow these guidelines to avoid spreading giardiasis to others:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food.
2. Do not swim in recreational water (pools, hot tubs, lakes or rivers, the ocean, etc.) if you have *Giardia* and for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea stops. You can pass *Giardia* in your stool and contaminate water for several weeks after your symptoms have ended. This has resulted in outbreaks of *Giardia* among recreational water users.

Q. How can I prevent a *Giardia* infection?

Practice good hygiene.

1. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.
 - a. Wash hands after using the toilet and before handling or eating food (especially for persons with diarrhea).
 - b. Wash hands after every diaper change, especially if you work with diaper-aged children, even if you are wearing gloves.
2. Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea (essential for children in diapers).

Avoid water that might be contaminated.

1. Do not swallow recreational water
2. Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers and ponds
3. If unsure about the water source, heat the water to a rolling boil for at least one minute.

For more information, call Des Moines Water Works at (515) 283-8700 or visit www.dmww.com.

For additional information, visit **www.cdc.gov**.