



Giardia Fact Sheet

What is *Giardia*?

Giardia is a microscopic parasite that can infect the intestines of humans and other animals. It is sometimes called “beaver fever” due to its association with drinking unfiltered water while camping or hiking.

Who is at risk for *Giardia*?

Anyone can get infected with *Giardia*. Some groups of people who are more likely to get *Giardia* include: kids in childcare settings, people who have close contact with others already sick with *Giardia*, people who drink water or use ice made from improperly treated water, people who play in recreational water sources like lakes and ponds and accidentally swallow water, international travelers, and people exposed to human poop through sexual contact.

How is *Giardia* spread?

People and animals who are sick with *Giardia* will shed the parasite in their poop. Anything that comes in contact with the poop will become contaminated with *Giardia*. This could include surfaces (such as bathroom surfaces, hands, and changing tables), water sources that are not treated or are improperly treated, and food. People become infected by swallowing the parasite, such as by drinking water from a river without filtering it or by eating uncooked food prepared by someone who did not wash their hands.

What are the symptoms of *Giardia* infection?

Giardia causes gastrointestinal illness. Symptoms can include diarrhea, gas, greasy stool, abdominal cramps, nausea, and dehydration. These symptoms can lead to weight loss. In otherwise healthy people, symptoms may last 2 to 6 weeks. Some people may have no symptoms at all.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms begin 1 to 3 weeks after becoming infected.

How is this disease diagnosed?

Lab tests are done on stool specimens to identify *Giardia*. Testing can be difficult, so multiple samples of stool may be needed.

What is the treatment for *Giardia* infection?

There are medicines available to treat *Giardia*. See a healthcare provider for a prescription. Sick people should be sure to drink a lot of fluids to prevent dehydration.

What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease?

- WASH YOUR HANDS thoroughly after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or before preparing food. Wash your hands after contact with animals or their environments.
- Avoid drinking unfiltered or untreated water.
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, streams, pools, and kiddie pools.
- Prevent contact and contamination with feces during sex.