

Giardiasis (Giardia)



What Is It?

Giardiasis is a chronic diarrhea illness caused by a parasite, *Giardia lamblia*.

What Are the Symptoms?

Many children infected with giardia have no symptoms. Other children may have foul-smelling, greasy diarrhea, gas, stomach aches, fatigue and weight loss. Although many persons who have giardiasis do not experience these symptoms, they are still passing *Giardia lamblia* cysts in their stools and are infectious if untreated.

Health care providers will diagnose giardiasis by examination of stool under a microscope. Because *Giardia lamblia* is present in stools only some of the time, several examinations must be made. Most health providers agree that persons with giardiasis who are ill and/or have diarrhea should receive medication.

Who Gets It and How?

Giardia is very common — between three and 20 percent of all people have it at any one time. It spreads quickly at child care facilities, especially when infants and children in diapers are present. *Giardia* is spread from person to person when a person touches the stool or an object which has been contaminated by the stool of an infected person, and then ingests the germs. Infection is often spread by not properly washing hands after bowel movements, after changing diapers or before preparing foods. *Giardia* may also be transmitted through contaminated water, such as in water play tables. Outbreaks have also been linked to portable wading pools and contaminated water supplies. After exposure, it usually takes one to two weeks to develop the illness.

When Should People with this Illness Be Excluded?

Exclude if there is diarrhea with illness, fever or vomiting. After diarrhea resolves the patient may return to child care.

Where Should I Report It?

Notify parents and staff if a child or staff member is diagnosed with giardiasis. Also notify your health consultant and your local health department.

How Can I Limit the Spread?

- Exclude any child or adult with acute diarrhea.
- Make sure that all children and adults practice good hand washing techniques.
- In a large child care facility, the person preparing food should not change diapers.
- In a small child care facility, the child care provider should carefully wash hands after changing diapers and before handling foods.
- If possible, keep diapered children apart from toilet-trained children.
- Wash and disinfect toys that can be put in a child's mouth after each child's use.
- Use diapers that can contain liquid stool or urine.
- Make sure that diapers have waterproof outer covers or use plastic pants.
- Children should wear clothes over diapers.
- Wash children's hands before they use water play tables.