



1. What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis (gee-are-dye-uh-sis) is a disease caused by a parasite (an organism living in or on another organism). Once a person's infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and passes in the stool. Giardiasis can be found in both contaminated drinking water and recreational water (water from pools, jacuzzis, lakes, rivers).

2. How do you get giardiasis?

You can get giardiasis by:

- Eating contaminated food
- Drinking contaminated water
- Handling infected pets and animals
- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands
- Being exposed to human stool through sexual contact

Anyone can get giardiasis but it's more common where human or animal waste is not thrown away safely and it contaminates water. People at risk for infection include people who attend or work at day care centers, international travelers and swimmers who swallow contaminated water.

3. How do you know if you have giardiasis?

The most common symptoms of giardiasis include:

- Diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Upset stomach
- Dehydration
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Gas
- Weight Loss

Some people with giardiasis will have no symptoms at all, while others can become very sick. Symptoms usually begin one to two weeks after the person is infected. If you think you have giardiasis, see your doctor. Your stool may be tested for giardiasis.

4. How is giardiasis treated?

Some people with giardiasis will recover without treatment while others may need medication if they are very sick. Women should tell their doctors if they are pregnant before receiving treatment. Patients, especially children and pregnant women, should drink extra fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts.

5. How can giardiasis be prevented?

- To prevent spreading the infection, every member of the household should wash their hands with soap and clean water often, especially at these times:
 - Before eating or preparing food
 - After using the bathroom or changing diapers
 - After handling pets or animals
- Wash and peel all fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Do not swim in recreational water (pools, hot tubs, lakes, rivers, oceans, etc.) if you have giardiasis and for at least 2 weeks after the diarrhea stops.
- Avoid sexual practices that might result in oral exposure to stool (e.g.: oral-anal contact).
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has a weak immune system.

Sources

1. *Giardiasis*. L.A. Department of Public Health. <http://www.lapublichealth.org/acd/>
2. *Giardiasis*. California Department of Public Health. www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo
3. *Giardiasis*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions

For additional resources, please visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.