

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrhoeal illness caused by a protozoan parasite and is a common cause of infectious diarrhoea. The disease occurs worldwide (including the UK and the United States) and incidence is higher in areas where there is a lack of basic sanitation.

How is it spread?

Giardia infection is associated with ingestion of contaminated water. Food borne outbreaks do occur, but are less common. Person to person transmission also occurs, particularly between small children in day care facilities, and amongst men who have sex with men.

Signs and Symptoms:

The majority of cases are asymptomatic, but in those that do experience clinical illness the incubation period is between 1 and 3 weeks, and therefore symptoms may begin after a traveller has returned home. Symptoms often last for more than 10 days and sometimes longer than a month.

The most common symptoms are diarrhoea, accompanied by abdominal cramps, bloating, nausea, anorexia and weight loss. Less common symptoms include vomiting and fever.

You're most infectious from when your symptoms start until 2 days after they've passed. Stay off school or work until your symptoms have stopped for 2 days.

Treatment:

Persons who have appropriate risk factors and a prolonged diarrhoeal illness often with weight loss, should be suspected of having giardiasis. A confirmed diagnosis can be made by a stool examination and testing.

Lactose intolerance and an irritable-bowel like syndrome can occur following giardiasis and should be distinguished from relapse of the infection.

Giardiasis responds promptly to treatment with specific antibiotics.

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Tips for treating Diarrhoea:

Do's

- Drink lots of fluids to avoid dehydration, such as water and squash – if you're well hydrated, your pee should be light yellow or clear
- Give your baby breast or bottle feeds as usual if you or your baby are ill
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently
- Wash dirty clothing and bedding separately on a hot wash
- Clean toilet seats, flush handles, taps, surfaces and door handles every day
- See a doctor if diarrhoea is bloody, persistent or associated with fever.

Don'ts

- Do not drink alcohol while taking your antibiotics – alcohol can react with the main antibiotics used to treat giardiasis
- Do not prepare food for other people, if possible
- Do not share towels, wash cloths, flannels, cutlery and utensils
- Do not use a swimming pool until 2 weeks after your symptoms stop

Prevention:

There is no vaccine or tablet to take to prevent Giardia. Travellers should be advised to observe food and water hygiene practices.

Giardia intestinalis parasites are moderately resistant to chlorine levels found in drinking water, and if there has been a faecal accident in a swimming pool, swimmers may become infected. Travellers are advised to avoid swallowing water whilst swimming and refrain from using swimming pools if experiencing diarrhoea.

Some water purification products are effective against giardia. Ask your travel health advisor about these.

This leaflet is based on information from:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/giardiasis/>

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