

Giardiasis

What is Giardiasis?

This intestinal illness is caused by the protozoan parasite *Giardia lamblia*. Symptoms include diarrhea (loose, greasy, pale stool), abdominal cramps, bloating, fatigue, dehydration, and weight loss. Some people may have no symptoms at all. Children are infected more frequently than adults.

How is Giardiasis spread?

This parasite is found in the intestinal tract of humans and some wild and domestic animals. The infection is sometimes called Beaver Fever, as infected beavers can contaminate surface waters. Illness is usually caused by ingesting contaminated drinking or recreational water, or contaminated food. Person to person spread can occur with hand to mouth transfer of the parasite from contact with the feces of an infected person. This is probably the most common means of spread in day care centres.

Incubation Period

The period of time from when a person ingests the parasite to the time they develop symptoms is usually 7 to 10 days, although sometimes symptoms can occur in 3 days or take as long as 25 days or more.

How can you prevent Giardiasis?

- Wash your hands thoroughly after using the toilet, and before preparing or eating food.
- Do not drink untreated surface water (routine chlorination of water will not kill the parasite; water should be filtered and or boiled).
- Protect public water supplies from contamination from human and animal feces.
- If you develop Giardiasis you should not use recreational water such as swimming pools, whirlpools, splash pads, lakes and rivers until you have been symptom free for at least two weeks.
- If you work in foodservice, day care centres, or provide care for hospitalized patients or persons in care homes, you should remain off work until at least 24 hours after your symptoms have resolved.