

# FactSheet

Para Su Información

## Giardiasis

### **What is giardiasis?**

Giardiasis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Giardia lamblia*. Giardiasis has a worldwide distribution and is a common cause of diarrhea in the United States.

### **Who gets giardiasis?**

Anyone can get giardiasis, but children are infected more frequently than adults. Persons who drink untreated water also are at greater risk of becoming infected with *Giardia*.

### **Where are *Giardia* organisms found?**

Humans are the main host of *Giardia*, but *Giardia* cysts can also be found in dogs, beavers and other domestic and wild animals. *Giardia* cysts are also found in lakes and streams contaminated with feces from an infected animal or human. *Giardia* may also be present in areas of poor sanitation, and daycare centers with children who are not toilet trained.

### **How is giardiasis spread?**

*Giardia* is passed in the feces of an infected person or animal and may contaminate food or water. The disease can spread from person-to-person in daycare centers, especially those that care for children who are not toilet trained. Backpackers, campers and hunters may get giardiasis by drinking directly from lakes or streams, even though the water may appear very clean.

### **What are the symptoms of giardiasis?**

The most common symptoms of giardiasis include mild or severe diarrhea with loose and pale greasy stools, stomach cramps, bloating, weight loss, and fatigue. Fever is rare. Some people may not become ill, but may still transmit their infection. Young children often have no symptoms. (Children in

daycare centers may often be infected, but do not need treatment unless they get diarrhea.)

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Diarrhea usually begins within 7-10 days, but may be as early as 5 days or as late as 25 days after infection with *Giardia*.

### **How long can an infected person spread *Giardia*?**

The disease can be spread as long as the infected person excretes cysts. Treatment may shorten length of time.

### **What is the treatment for giardiasis?**

Anti-parasitic medication is often given to treat giardiasis. Some people recover without treatment.

### **Does everyone infected with *giardia* need to be treated?**

No.

### **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?**

Children with diarrhea should not attend a childcare facility. They may return when diarrhea stops. Foodhandlers and childcare workers who have giardiasis must test negative for *Giardia Lamblia* cysts before returning to work.

### **What can be done to stop the spread of giardiasis?**

Some general guidelines are:

- Carefully wash hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Dispose of sewage properly so water sources will not be infected.

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- Do not drink water that has not been properly treated. When camping, boil your water before drinking.

**Where can I get more information?**

Contact your doctor or the Southern Nevada Health District, Office of Epidemiology at (702) 759-1300.



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