

ALLEGAN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Office Administration

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Bioterrorism Preparedness

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Personal Health

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Communicable Disease

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Giardia

What is Giardia?

Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a one-cell parasite called *Giardia lamblia*. It is a fairly common cause of diarrhea. Cases may occur as a single case, in clusters, or in outbreaks.

How is it spread?

The *Giardia* parasite is passed in the stool of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. Ingesting the parasite may cause illness. Person-to-person transmission may also occur in households, day care centers, or other settings where hand-washing practices are poor. *Giardia* outside the body can survive for weeks or months.

What is the incubation period?

The symptoms appear 1 – 2 weeks after exposure (average 7 days).

What are the symptoms?

People exposed to *Giardia* may experience mild or severe diarrhea, abdominal cramps, bloating, greasy stool, nausea, vomiting, and excessive amounts of gas in the stomach; in some instances no symptoms may be present.

How long is it contagious?

A person can shed the parasite in stool throughout the entire period of infection, from weeks to months.

Can it be treated?

A healthcare provider may prescribe a medication to treat *Giardia* infection. In some instances, giardiasis can be self-resolving.

How to prevent Giardia:

- Carefully wash hands thoroughly after toilet visits and before eating or handling food.
- Wash hands after every diaper change, especially if you work with diaper-aged children, even if you are wearing gloves.
- Avoid contact with feces during sex.
- Avoid consuming water from recreational use areas (e.g., rivers, lakes, ponds) and improperly treated drinking water.

Additional Information

Food handlers who develop *giardiasis*, or any other diarrhea illness, should be excluded from duties involving food preparation. Additionally, persons in high-risk settings for transmission should be excluded until *Giardia* cysts are no longer present in their stool. More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/giardia

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact an Allegan County Public Health Nurse at 269-673-5411.