

Giardiasis Fact Sheet

1. **What is Giardiasis?** - Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by a microscopic parasite, *Giardia lamblia*. It is a common cause of a parasitic diarrheal disease. Approximately 1000 cases are confirmed each year in Pennsylvania.
2. **Who gets Giardiasis?** - Anyone can get Giardiasis, but it tends to be diagnosed most often *in persons in institutional settings*, persons in day care centers, foreign travelers, and persons who drink contaminated water.
3. **How do people become infected by Giardia?** - The parasite is passed in the feces of an infected person or animal. People become infected with Giardia when they eat fecal contaminated food, or drink water contaminated with the parasite. Direct person-to-person spread can occur in day care centers or other institutional settings where hand washing practices are poor. Sexual activity that involves anal-oral contact can also spread the parasite.
4. **Where is the Giardia parasite found?** - Giardia has been found in infected persons (with or without symptoms) and in wild and domesticated animals. The beaver has been identified as a possible source of Giardia in lakes and streams, but other sources, including humans, are probably equally important.
5. **What are the symptoms of Giardia?** - Giardia can cause mild or severe diarrhea, bloating and abdominal cramps. Some people infected with Giardia will not experience any symptoms. Fever is rare. Occasionally, some infected persons will have chronic symptoms that last weeks or months, and they may experience significant weight loss.
6. **How soon do symptoms appear?** - Symptoms can take from 3 to 25 days to appear, but most often appear within 10 days after exposure.
7. **How long can an infected person continue to carry Giardia?** - An infected person can carry the Giardia parasite in their intestines for a few weeks to a few months. Treatment with specific antibiotics can shorten this time.
8. **What is the treatment for Giardia?** - Effective antibiotics include metronidazole (Flagyl), atabrine, or furazolidone. Some infected persons may recover without treatment.
9. **Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?** – As a general rule, food workers should not prepare food while they have diarrhea. Food workers and persons in other higher risk situations must be tested to show they no longer have the Giardia parasite in their stool before returning to work,. Persons with diarrhea who cannot control their bowel habits (such as infants, young children, or certain handicapped persons) may need to be excluded from day care or group activities until they no longer experience diarrhea. Treatment with antibiotics can speed up recovery and reduce possible spread of the parasite. Please consult your local health department for advice. Other persons who are not in high-risk settings for



spreading the parasite may return to their routine activities so long as careful hand washing is performed after using the toilet.

10. How can the spread of Giardia parasites be prevented?

- a. Wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- b. Properly dispose of sewage wastes so as to not contaminate surface or groundwater.
- c. Avoid drinking improperly treated water.

11. For more information about Giardiasis:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/giardiasis/default.htm>

This fact sheet provides general information. Please contact your physician and/or veterinarian for specific clinical information related to you or your animal.