

# GIARDIA (Giardiasis, Giardia enteritis)

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Your Questions Answered

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EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## What is Giardia?

Giardiasis is caused by a microscopic parasite called *Giardia lamblia*.

## How do I know that I have Giardia?

Diagnosis can only be confirmed by examination of a sample of your faeces. This is; usually at the request of your doctor .

## How is Giardia spread?

Giardia is highly infectious. When a person has the parasite they pass it in their faeces. The disease can then be transmitted:

- often directly from person to person, such as between sexual partners or amongst young children
- sometimes indirectly via contaminated food
- frequently from contaminated drinking water especially when abroad

Large outbreaks can occur in many parts of the world where water supplies may become contaminated with raw sewage. Always use caution before drinking water from an unknown source. Do not drink untreated water from a lake or stream, especially if these are near farm animals. If only untreated water is available, boil the water before drinking it.

## What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms are chronic diarrhoea, abdominal pain, and bloated stomach. More long-term effects can include impaired digestion, lactose intolerance, intermittent diarrhoea, tiredness and weight loss. Many infected people may have very mild or no symptoms at all.

## How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of giardia appear 5 to 25 days after exposure. The average incubation is 7 to 10 days. The symptoms usually last for a couple of weeks. Occasionally, the illness may last much longer causing recurrent mild or moderate symptoms.

## How long is a person able to spread Giardia?

Throughout the entire period they carry the parasite, even if they show no symptoms. Most people recover from the infection on their own.

## Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

All cases of gastroenteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. All infected people should stay away from work or school until free from diarrhoea and vomiting (without medication) for at least 48 hours. Inform your employer, child carer or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

If you belong to one of the following 'high risk' groups, additional precautions are needed & you have a duty to report your illness to your employer, child carer or school.

- food handlers involved with unwrapped or ready to eat food,
- staff of health care facilities in contact with food or patients,
- children aged below 5 years attending nurseries, playgroups, etc
- older children and adults who may find it difficult to carry out good personal hygiene

Infected people in these groups must not return to work, school or nursery until their symptoms have ceased and their bowel habits have been normal for at least 48 hours (without medication). This is provided that they wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

It is very important to get in touch with us if you, or anyone else in your household, are in one of these 'high risk' groups. This is to enable us to give any necessary advice to halt the potential spread of the illness.

## **Visitors**

It is strongly recommended you do not have any visitors (this includes friends, family and your children's friends) into your home until everyone within your home has fully recovered and the appropriate testing has confirmed the infection has totally cleared. This is particularly important for children under the age of 5 or older children/adults who are unable to carry out good personal hygiene.

## **How can I prevent it spreading??**

### **Handwashing**

Hand washing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap under warm running water:

- AFTER using or cleaning the toilet
- AFTER touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting
- AFTER attending to anybody who is unwell
- AFTER handling dirty laundry, clothing or bedding
- AFTER handling used nappies
- BEFORE handling, preparing, serving, or consuming food or drink
- AFTER touching animals during visits at farms, wildlife parks, zoos, pet corners, etc

People who are ill should ideally use anti-bacterial liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands properly as this helps to remove bacteria. Young children should be assisted to ensure they wash their hands properly.

Giardia cysts are resistant to pool water treatment. You should therefore avoid using swimming pools until you have been free from the illness for 2 weeks.

## **Cleaning the toilet**

For as long as people are unwell:

- Disinfect the toilet seat after each use, using a separate cloth
- Wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use
- Disinfect the door handle, wash hand basin taps and flush handle after use
- Clean the toilet bowl using a (toilet) brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet, and replace in its holder
- Keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only
- Flush the toilet with the seat and lid down

## **Laundry**

- Dirty laundry from persons with food poisoning should be kept separate from other laundry
- If possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- Wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions

## **Food Safety Points to remember**

- ALWAYS keep raw meat separate from other foods
- ALWAYS cook meat thoroughly, including at barbecues. This is normally until the juices run clear
- AVOID eating or drinking untreated milk or dairy products, or drinking untreated water

**REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY  
ASSIST YOUNG CHILDREN TO WASH THEIR HANDS PROPERLY  
MAKE SURE EVERYBODY FOLLOWS THESE PRECAUTIONS**

**Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:**

East Cambridgeshire District Council  
Environmental Services  
The Grange  
Nutholt Lane  
Ely, Cambs CB7 4EE  
Tel: 01353 665555  
Fax: 01353 616223