

Giardia

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis, often called “Beaver Fever”, is a diarrheal illness caused by the parasite Giardia. It is a common cause of diarrhea in the United States, where about 20,000 cases are reported each year. Giardia is so common; it can be found within every region on the United States and around the world. Giardiasis is no longer a reportable disease in Oklahoma.

Where is Giardia found?

Giardia is found in infected people (with or without symptoms) and wild and domestic animals. Giardia is also found on surfaces or in lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams that are contaminated with feces (stool) from infected humans or animals.

How is giardiasis spread?

People and animals infected with Giardia pass it in their stool, and it may contaminate water, food, or surfaces such as door handles or toys. People may become infected directly by hands of an infected person can become soiled while they are using the toilet, and if they are not thoroughly washed, Giardia can be transferred to food, drink, or items handled or eaten by another person. People can also become infected indirectly by swallowing water that has been contaminated with infected stool (ex: swimming in lakes or drinking untreated water from streams). Person-to-person transmission may occur in daycare centers or group settings where people do not have access to hand washing facilities or where hand hygiene is poor.

Who gets giardiasis?

While giardiasis is often thought of as a camping or backpacking-related illness, anyone can get giardiasis. People more likely to become infected include:

- Children in childcare settings, especially children in diapers
- Close contacts of people ill with giardiasis
- Backpackers, hikers and campers who drink water or use ice made from untreated or improperly treated water sources (ex: lakes, streams, rivers)
- People who have private water systems (Wells or springs) that are not correctly installed or maintained
- People who swallow water while swimming or playing in Giardia contaminated recreational water, especially in lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams
- Men who have sex with men
- International travelers

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Giardia can cause a variety of symptoms including mild to severe diarrhea, stomach cramps, gas, bloating, upset stomach, pale and greasy stools, and fatigue. Sometimes diarrhea may last several weeks or months and can cause weight loss. People rarely experience a fever with giardiasis. Some people with Giardia infection will have no symptoms at all. Many young children have no symptoms and are the source of infection for other children, especially in day care settings.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin within 7–14 days but can appear from 3–25 days after infection with Giardia

How long can an infected person spread Giardia?

An infected person can spread Giardia for a few weeks to a few months. Treatment may shorten this length of time.

What is the treatment for Giardia?

There are several antibiotics that a doctor may prescribe to treat giardiasis. It is also important to prevent dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids. This is especially the case for infants and pregnant women who may be more likely to become dehydrated from the diarrhea caused by giardiasis.

Does everyone infected with Giardia need to be treated?

People who are infected with Giardia but do not have symptoms do not usually need to be treated. People who have tested positive and show symptoms for Giardia should talk to their healthcare provider about treatment.

What can be done to stop the spread of giardiasis?

- Practice Good Hand Hygiene
 - Help keep yourself and your loved ones healthy by washing your hands often with soap and water, especially during key times when you are likely to spread germs. Since Giardia germs can be found in soil, wash hands with soap and water after field work, landscaping, or gardening, even if you were wearing gloves.
- At childcare facilities
 - Keep children who are sick with diarrhea home from childcare settings until the diarrhea has stopped. Clean, sanitize, or disinfect toys and surfaces. Wash hands regularly with soap and water to keep kids and caregivers healthy. Encourage good diapering practices.
- At the pool, lake, and other places we swim
 - Do not swallow the water. Do not swim or let kids swim if sick with diarrhea. Shower before you get in the water. Take young children on frequent bathroom breaks or check diapers every hour. Change diapers in a bathroom or diaper-changing area —not waterside—to keep germs and poop out of the water.
- Around animals
 - Minimize contact with the poop of all animals, especially young animals. Do not touch your face or mouth after being near animals and wash your hands as soon as possible after touching animals or anything in the area where they live and roam.