

Giardiasis

An infection of the bowel caused by the parasite *Giardia duodenalis*, also known as *Giardia lamblia* or *Giardia intestinalis*. This parasite is a single-celled organism and is found worldwide. Although it occurs in many animals including dogs, cats, sheep and cattle there is still some uncertainty about the extent of disease transmission between people and animals.

Symptoms include:

- > stomach cramps
- > excessive gas or bloating
- > diarrhoea, which may be watery, usually lasting one to several weeks
- > frequent loose or pale, greasy stools which may float in the toilet bowl
- > fatigue
- > weight loss
- > lactose intolerance may occur in 20 – 40% of cases and last several weeks.

Fever and bloody diarrhoea are not usually seen with *Giardia* infections. Many infected people have no symptoms. The infection is diagnosed by examining the faeces under a microscope.

Spread takes place when hands, objects or food become contaminated with faeces of infected people or animals, or by drinking contaminated water. The parasites must be taken in by mouth to cause infection. In institutions and preschool centres, person-to-person transmission may be a significant means of spreading the illness. Transmission can occur with some sexual practices where there is contact with faecal matter. Re-infection can occur.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

3 – 25 days or longer (usually 7 – 10 days).

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

For as long as the organism is present in the faeces (often months), whether or not the person is ill. A person with diarrhoea is more likely to spread infection than a well person, but a person without symptoms is still potentially infectious to others.

Treatment

Treatment of an ill person with appropriate antibiotic medication relieves symptoms and usually makes the person non-infectious within a few days.

Control of spread

- > Exclude from child care, preschool, school or work until there has been no diarrhoea or vomiting for 24 hours. If working in a child care, health care or commercial food setting, the exclusion period should be 48 hours
- > Follow good hand washing procedures.
- > Water suspected of contamination should be boiled before drinking.
- > Treatment of infected people reduces spread.

- > **Hand Hygiene**
- > **Collecting a Faecal Sample**