



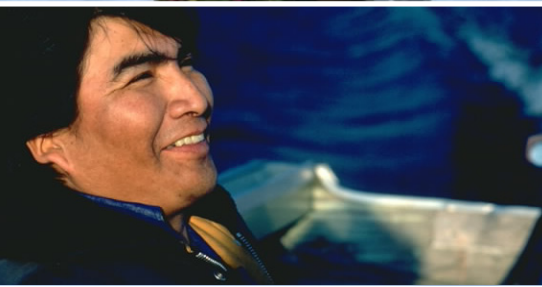
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Giardiasis Facts



What is giardia?

Giardia is a parasite. When this parasite is swallowed it can cause a diarrheal illness called giardiasis or “Beaver Fever”. Giardia lives in the intestines of infected humans and animals but can be found in soil, food, water and on surfaces or hands that have been contaminated with the stool of an infected person or animal.

What causes giardia?

Giardia is spread by swallowing the parasite on something that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person or animal. Common examples are drinking water, recreational water, and raw food. Pets and wild animals can also be infected with giardia.

What are the symptoms of giardia?

Most people have frequent diarrhea, loose and pale greasy stools, stomach cramps and bloating. These symptoms may cause weight loss and dehydration. Symptoms can begin 3 to 25 days (average is 7 to 10 days) after you are exposed to the parasite. Most healthy persons recover in two to six weeks. You may be infected and experience no symptoms at all.

You can spread giardia to others as long as you are shedding giardia in your stool – sometimes this may last months. People with other medical conditions, especially those with HIV, may develop more serious complications.

Who is most at risk for giardiasis?

In Canada, giardiasis is most common in children less than five years of age and in adults 25 to 39 years of age (usually the parents of these children). People with AIDS may have a more serious illness that may last longer.

How is giardiasis treated?

Your health care provider may suggest antibiotics. It is important to drink plenty of fluids when you have diarrhea so you do not become dehydrated.

How can I reduce the risk of giardia infection?

Always wash your hands after using the toilet, before preparing or eating meals, after changing diapers, after engaging in sexual activity, and after being in close contact with pets and wild animals

Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds and streams. The amount of chlorine used in routine water treatment does not kill giardia, especially when the water is cold. If you are unsure of the safety of your drinking water, boil your water for one minute to destroy the parasite.

Avoid swallowing recreational water for example: swimming pools, wading pools, lakes, rivers, streams.

Do not drink raw or unpasteurized milk and fruit juices.

Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all foods that are to be eaten raw.

When in areas where you are unsure of the water treatment and sanitation systems, avoid eating uncooked foods. Eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot. Safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and bottled beverages with no ice. Avoid tap water, or ice made from tap water.

If you are infected with giardia, and you provide services to others, particularly seniors or children, you should not go to work while you are having symptoms. Your employer will tell you when it is safe for you to return.

Do not swim if you have diarrhea. Avoid public recreational waters for two weeks after your symptoms have gone away. It is possible that even after you are feeling better you will still be shedding the parasite in your stool for a period of time.

Adapted from Simcoe-Muskoka Public Health Unit

