

Giardiasis

Frequently Asked Questions



What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal illness caused by a parasite. It is often called *Giardia*.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of *Giardia* can include:

- Diarrhea (often greasy)
- Flatulence (gas)
- Stomach cramps/pain
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Dehydration

How does it spread?

The parasite that causes *Giardia* lives in the intestine of humans and animals. The infection can be transmitted from drinking contaminated water or ice, which includes swallowing contaminated water while swimming. It can also be passed through contaminated food, touching surfaces that have been contaminated with fecal matter from an infected person.

Who is at risk of developing *Giardia*?

Anyone can become infected with *Giardia*. It is more common for these groups to get it:

- Travelers and immigrants from areas with a high rate of *Giardia*
- Diaper aged children, especially in child care settings
- Close contacts with someone who has *Giardia*
- Swimmers who swallow contaminated water while swimming
- People exposed to stool during sexual activity

Philadelphia has seen outbreak situations associated with swimming pools.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

The test for *Giardia* is through a stool specimen to look for the parasite. Your physician may request several stool cultures because it can be hard to distinguish from another similar parasite. *Giardia* can be treated with antibiotics. Diarrhea can cause fluid loss and dehydration, so it is important to drink fluids.

What should I do if I think I have it?

Contact your physician if you think you have *Giardia*.

How is it prevented?

- Good hand washing can help prevent *Giardia*, especially after going to the bathroom or changing diapers, and before preparing food.
- If you are traveling to an area where *Giardia* is common, make sure to drink bottled water or boil the water and do not drink drinks with ice cubes.
- If you are swimming, follow proper swimming hygiene. Do not swim until 2 weeks after your diarrhea has stopped, and shower before swimming.

For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.

