



THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
Occupational Health Program

Giardiasis

1.0 Introduction

Giardia is a single-celled parasite that can cause a gastrointestinal illness known as giardiasis. The parasite is found in the feces of infected animals or humans. To become infected, a person must consume food or water contaminated with fecal material containing *Giardia*.

2.0 People at Risk

Animal workers who are exposed to animal feces are at increased risk of contracting giardiasis. Human care givers exposed to human fecal material, including parents performing diaper changes, are also at risk for developing giardiasis. Children are especially prone to infection as they often put items into their mouth that may have been in contact with soil, water or fecal material contaminated with *Giardia*.

3.0 Transmission

A person can be infected by direct hand-to-mouth transfer of the parasite from human or animal feces. A person may also become infected with *Giardia* from drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated food. Streams or lakes may be contaminated by animal feces and infect swimmers or hikers drinking contaminated water. Giardiasis may be spread by a person without symptoms who still may serve as a carrier of the parasite.

4.0 Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear seven to ten days after the organism is ingested, however this can be shorter or longer depending on the amount ingested. The symptoms include diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating, gas, fatigue or even weight loss. These symptoms may last several weeks. Infected persons may be contagious for months. Many people may have no symptoms but may still be carriers.

5.0 Diagnosis, Prevention and Treatment

Diagnosis:

- Giardiasis is diagnosed by examining stool samples for the presence of the *Giardia* parasite. This may take several samples to confirm the presence or absence of the parasite.

Prevention:

- Wash hands thoroughly after animal caretaking, or any exposure to human or animal feces
- Wash hands thoroughly after using the restroom
- Do not eat, drink, use tobacco or apply make up in animal caretaking or housing areas
- Clean treatment tables and animal care surfaces frequently using antibacterial disinfectant spray or wipes.
- Do not drink water from potentially contaminated sources such as springs, lakes, or rivers. Swimmers who swallow water from swimming pools, hot tubs, or other recreational water sources are also at risk of ingesting *Giardia*.

- Never prepare food for others if you have diarrhea.

Treatment:

- Individuals who have giardiasis without symptoms usually do not require treatment. Many people who do have symptoms often recover on their own in a few weeks. Individuals who develop a fever, dehydration, persistent loose stools or diarrhea should consult their physician for diagnosis and treatment.
- When signs and symptoms are severe or the infection persists, physicians usually treat giardiasis with antibiotics, including Metronidazole, Tinidazole or Nitazoxanide.

6.0 Resources

[CDC Giardiasis Link](#)

For further information related to possible zoonotic disease exposure, or further related resources, please contact UT Occupational Health Nurse Bryan Cranmore RN, COHN at bcranmore@utk.edu, or for urgent response the OHP nurse can be reached at 865-755-8924

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