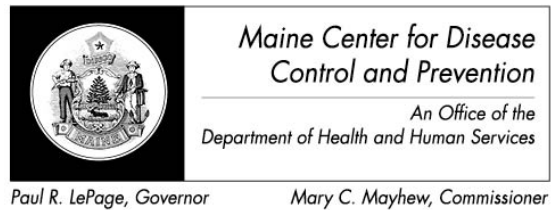


Giardiasis

Fact Sheet



What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal illness caused by a parasite called *Giardia*. This parasite is the most common intestinal parasitic disease affecting people.

How is giardiasis spread?

The parasite must be swallowed to cause disease. Swallowing as few as 10 *Giardia* cysts might cause someone to become ill. *Giardia* can be spread by:

- Swallowing something that has come into contact with feces of a person or animal infected with *Giardia*
- Swallowing *Giardia* picked up from surfaces (such as bathroom fixtures, changing tables, diaper pails, or toys) contaminated with feces from an infected person
- Swallowing water while swimming or playing in water where *Giardia* may live, especially in lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, and streams
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*
- Having contact with someone who is ill with giardiasis
- Traveling to countries where giardiasis is common

Persons who are more likely to become infected with *Giardia* include children attending day care; child care workers; parents or caretakers of infected children; backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water; people who drink from shallow wells; persons with history of travel to areas where the disease is common and persons exposed to human feces through sexual contact.

What are the signs and symptoms of giardiasis?

Giardiasis can cause a variety of intestinal symptoms, which include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas or flatulence
- Greasy stools that tend to float

- Stomach cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea

These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 weeks after infection and last 2 to 6 weeks. Some people with giardiasis have no symptoms at all.

How do I know if I have giardiasis?

Contact your healthcare provider if you have symptoms of giardiasis. Your provider must send your stool sample to a laboratory. The laboratory will look at the sample with a microscope to see if there are any *Giardia* parasites in it. Because testing can be difficult, you may be asked to submit several stool specimens collected over several days.

How is giardiasis treated?

There are several medicines that are used to treat giardiasis. They are available by prescription from your healthcare provider. Other treatments for diarrhea, such as drinking more fluids, may be recommended by your healthcare provider.

How does *Giardia* get into food and water?

Giardia lives in the intestine of infected humans or animals. Millions of parasites can be released in a bowel movement from an infected human or animal. *Giardia* is found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals.

Are there long term consequences to giardiasis?

Persons with giardiasis who have an otherwise healthy immune system usually recover fully with or without treatment. In some cases treatment failure may occur. Relapse is common in patients who do not have a healthy immune system; they may require prolonged treatment.

If I have giardiasis, can I get it again?

Yes. Persons that have giardiasis and have completed treatment can have reappearance of symptoms. This is often due to one of two reasons: re-infection or treatment failure. If you

have recently been treated for giardiasis and your symptoms reappear, be sure to talk to your healthcare provider to determine the cause and appropriate next steps.

How can giardiasis be prevented?

Giardiasis can be prevented by practicing good hygiene and by using caution before drinking water from an unknown source. Some general guidelines are:

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
 - before eating,
 - before, during, and after preparing food
 - after using the toilet, and after changing diapers
 - after touching animals or their living environments
- Supervise and assist young children when washing hands
- Do not drink untreated water from a surface water supply, such as a pond, lake, or stream.
- Do not use or drink poorly treated water or use ice when traveling in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all food that is to be eaten raw
- If the safety of drinking water is in doubt (for example, during or after an outbreak, in a place with poor sanitation or lack of water treatment systems), do one of the following:
 - Drink bottled water
 - Disinfect tap water by heating it to a rolling boil for 1 minute
 - Use a filter that has been tested and rated by National Safety Foundation (NSF) Standard 53 or NSF Standard 58 for cyst and oocyst reduction; filtered tap water will need additional treatment to kill or weaken bacteria and viruses
- If your source of drinking water is a well or a private surface water supply, do not allow humans or animals to leave bowel contents near the water.
- At recreational water venues (pools, beaches, etc.)
 - Do not swallow water while swimming

- Protect others by not swimming if you have diarrhea (especially children in diapers)
- Shower before entering the water
- Wash children thoroughly especially their bottoms) with soap and water after they use the bathroom or after their diapers are changed and before they enter the water
- Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and check their diapers often
- Change diapers in the bathroom, not by the water

- If you are taking care of a person with giardiasis, scrub your hands with plenty of soap and water after contact with the person's stool. Promptly and carefully dispose of any material that has been contaminated with stool, and always wash your hands after such contact.
- Use barriers during oral-anal sex; wash hands after handling condoms or barriers used during anal sex

If my water comes from a private well, should I have my well water tested?

If you obtain your drinking water from a private well, consider testing your well water for bacterial contamination once a year. For more information, please visit: <http://wellwater.maine.gov>.

How common is giardiasis?

Each year, more than 20,000 cases of giardiasis are reported in the United States. Giardiasis is common in settings where hygiene is poor and in areas where there is little to no treatment of drinking water. Children under 5 years of age are most likely to get giardiasis.

Cases usually increase in the summer months when the climate is warm and provides an ideal environment for exposure to *Giardia* organisms.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting www.mainepublichealth.gov. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.