

Giardiasis

Definition:

Giardiasis is caused by a parasite called *Giardia*.

Signs and symptoms:

Some persons have no symptoms. Symptoms of *Giardia* infection include: diarrhea, gas, greasy stools that tend to float, stomach cramps, upset stomach, nausea, and dehydration. Symptoms may last 2 to 6 weeks. Sometimes, symptoms might seem to resolve, only to come back again after several days or weeks.

Transmission:

Giardia infections are mostly the result of exposure to a contaminated water source (drinking or recreational water) or from person to person (the parasite passes from stools or soiled fingers to the mouth of another person). Transmission can also occur from infected animals to persons. Rarely is *Giardia* transmitted by food, mostly if the food is contaminated by an ill food handler. Swallowing as few as 10 cysts might cause illness. An infected person might shed 1-10 billion cysts daily.

Diagnosis:

Giardiasis is diagnosed by clinical symptoms and laboratory tests. Laboratory tests include testing of stool for the presence of *Giardia* cysts or trophozoites or *Giardia* DNA.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Provide education to students and staff regarding good hand washing with soap and water
- Provide education to students and staff regarding safe drinking water sources
- Avoid swallowing water when swimming or playing in lakes, ponds, streams, swimming pools, and backyard “kiddie” pools
- If school uses well water, review school policies on water testing

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, the child should be referred to their healthcare provider
- Several drugs can be used to treat *Giardia* infections

Exclusions

- Students should be excluded from school and school activities while symptomatic with diarrhea; and from recreational water related activities for 2 weeks after symptoms have resolved

Reporting Requirements

- *Giardiasis* is a reportable disease – report to 1-800-821-5821

Resources:

- Maine CDC *Giardia* website (including fact sheet) <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/ddc/epi/disease/giardia.shtml>
- Maine CDC Recreational Water Illness (RWI) website <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/ddc/epi/healthyswimming/index.shtml>
- Maine CDC Well Water <http://wellwater.maine.gov>
- Federal CDC *Giardia* website <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/>
- Federal CDC Healthy Swimming website <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/>
- Federal CDC A Guide to Water Filters http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/crypto/gen_info/filters.html