

GIARDIASIS *

(GIARDIA INFECTION)

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrheal disease caused by a protozoan parasite *Giardia lamblia*. Once an animal or a person is infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and is passed in the stool. Because the parasite has a protective shell, it can survive outside the body and in the environment for long periods of time. It is one of the most common causes of waterborne disease (found in drinking and recreational water).

How is it spread?

Giardiasis is spread from person to person through hand-to-mouth contact and from swallowing contaminated water. Children are infected more frequently than adults and it is a common occurrence in day care centers where diapers are changed. Though it may not cause symptoms for some people, they can still be carriers and pass it on to others.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Giardia infection can cause multiple intestinal symptoms including: diarrhea, gas or flatulence, greasy stools that tend to float, stomach cramps, and upset stomach or nausea. These symptoms may lead to weight loss and dehydration. Some people with giardiasis have no symptoms at all.

What is the incubation period and how long is it communicable?

Symptoms normally begin in three (3) to twenty-five (25) days (on average 7-10) after becoming infected and may last two (2) to six (6) weeks and transmission may occur for the length of the infection. Asymptomatic carrier's rate is high.

Can I prevent this disease?

The best prevention is to wash your hands vigorously with soap and water especially:

After:	Toilet visits	Handling soiled clothes or linens
	Cleaning up vomitus or diarrhea	Contact with a symptomatic person
	Handling diapers (use glove)	
Before:	Eating, preparing food	

Also protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea.

It is recommended to use spray bottles to apply the disinfectant (1 part bleach to 9 part of cool water to be prepared daily) to contaminated surfaces such as toilets, sinks, floors, tables, water fountains or any areas where a sick individual has been.

What should I do about it?

Persons with the above symptoms should see their physician. Several medications are available for the treatment of this infection. This is a **reportable disease** to the Santa Rosa County Health Department (SRCHD).

Children and sensitive workers can **NOT** attend school/childcare and will need to be symptom free for 24 hours before being readmitted. The SRCHD Epidemiology Program may change exclusion rules at any time.

For more information, please contact the SRCHD at 850-983-5200.

