

GIARDIASIS

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by a one-celled parasite which is found in the feces (stool) of infected animals or humans.

What are symptoms of giardiasis?

Symptoms include diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating, gas, fatigue, or weight loss. It is also possible to be infected with giardia and not have any symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear 3-25 days or longer after exposure. The average time is 7-10 days.

How is giardiasis spread?

Infection can be spread when an infected person does not wash their hands well after using the bathroom (person to person). Infection is frequently caused by consuming contaminated food or water. Giardiasis is a common illness among campers who drink untreated water (even accidentally) from rivers or streams.

How long is a person infectious (contagious)?

A person ill with giardiasis is infectious while symptoms are present, possibly for months.

How is giardiasis diagnosed and what is the treatment?

Giardiasis is diagnosed by testing a person's stool for the parasite. There are several medications available to treat giardiasis.

How can I prevent a giardiasis infection?

1. Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water after using the bathroom or changing diapers. Make sure children also wash their hands well.
2. Drink only treated water. When camping or backpacking, bring bottled water with you or boil untreated water (i.e. river) for one minute before using it (even for washing).
3. Take care when traveling in developing countries. Foods and drinks, in particular raw fruits and vegetables, may be contaminated. Tap water or ice made from tap water, as well as items from street vendors, may also be contaminated.
4. Do not drink unpasteurized milk or eat milk products made from unpasteurized milk.
5. Wash fruits, vegetables, and dishes with safe water.
6. Don't cook for others if you have diarrhea.
7. Clean surfaces when diapers are changed after every use.
8. Wash your hands after handling animals or pets and their waste.

Giardiasis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Snohomish County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 425.339.5278, Monday-Friday, 8AM - 5PM.