

Giardiasis

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a bowel infection caused by the parasite *Giardia lamblia*.

How is it spread?

Person to person spread occurs by hand to mouth transfer of cysts from the faeces of an infected person. Spread may also occur by ingesting cysts from animal or human faecally contaminated recreational water, drinking water or food. *Giardia* is not present in the household drinking water in the Northern Territory.

What are the symptoms?



The symptoms develop 3 to 25 days or longer after infection, most commonly 7 to 10 days.



Symptoms of giardiasis include sudden onset of diarrhoea, or foul smelling, pale, greasy stools, stomach pains, bloating, loss of appetite, nausea, fatigue, weight loss, or poor weight gain in infants. The easiest way to confirm that *giardia* is the cause of the diarrhoea is by testing stools in the laboratory.



Some infected people may have no symptoms at all.



What is the infectious period?

While the *giardia* parasite remains in their faeces, infected people can pass the infection on to others. This can be



for many months. Some people may 'carry' the parasite in their bowel after the symptoms have resolved or they may not have had any symptoms at all.

Who is at risk?

Children are infected more frequently than adults. Children who attend childcare facilities are at greater risk of infections spread through faeces contamination. Spread occurs when children share toys or food that has become contaminated and place it in their mouths.

Drinking unfiltered surface water or swimming in bodies of freshwater increase the risk of contracting giardiasis.

What is the treatment?

Anyone with symptoms suggestive of giardiasis should be examined by a doctor. Antibiotics such as tinidazole or metronidazole may be prescribed.

Anyone with diarrhoea should drink extra fluids to avoid dehydration. Children with diarrhoea, who vomit or who refuse extra fluids should see a doctor. Anyone with prolonged or severe diarrhoea or who have symptoms that concern them, should see a doctor.

Medicines to prevent vomiting or diarrhoea should not be given, especially to children, except where specifically advised by a doctor.



How can giardiasis be prevented?

Good hygiene is the best way to prevent giardiasis.

Hands should be washed thoroughly with warm soapy water:

- after going to the toilet
- before preparing or handling food
- after every nappy change
- after changing soiled linen

Other measures include:

- never change nappies on tables or counters where food is prepared or eaten
- clean change areas with warm soapy water and disinfectant after every nappy change
- do not drink unfiltered water
- clean books, toys, equipment, furnishings, floors and toilets regularly (including toilet door handles)
- wash and/or peel fruit and vegetables before eating them

- frequent emptying of wading pools. Pools should be cleaned and left to dry and **not** be used by children who have diarrhoea.

People with diarrhoea should not prepare or handle food that will be eaten by others.

How can it be controlled?

Anyone with diarrhoea should not attend childcare/school/work until the diarrhoea has ceased.

Anyone with diarrhoea should not swim, wade or paddle in public pools.

For more information contact your nearest Centre for Disease Control.

Darwin	8922 8044
Katherine	8973 9049
Nhulunbuy	8987 0359
Tennant Creek	8962 4259
Alice Springs	8951 7549

Disease Control fact sheets on various topics are available by contacting your nearest centre or from our web site at <http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc>