



Will I need treatment?

Some people recover completely from giardiasis without specific treatment. For others, the infection persists for weeks or even months. Treatment with antibiotics will shorten the course of the illness and reduce the risk of spread to others.

When can I return to work? When can children return to school or childcare?

You are most infectious from when your symptoms start until 2 days after they have passed. In order to reduce the risk of spreading infection, you should not return to work, and children should not return to school or childcare until symptom free for 48 hours.

***If you are worried that you have contracted Giardiasis you should contact your General Practitioner (GP), who may ask you to provide a stool sample to confirm the diagnosis. If you would simply like more information contact either your GP or the Public Health Protection Unit at Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS Board.
Tel: 0141-201-4917***

**For further information
please log onto our website:**

<http://www.nhsggc.org.uk>

Public Health Protection Unit
West House
Gartnavel Royal Hospital
1055 Great Western Road
Glasgow G12 0XH

Phone: 0141 201 4917
Fax: 0141 201 4950
E-mail: phpu@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

Giardiasis

Patient information leaflet

Public Health Protection Unit 0141 201 4917

phpu@ggc.scot.nhs.uk

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a type of gastroenteritis, or inflammation of the intestines, caused by an infection with the parasite *Giardia lamblia*.

Where does it come from?

People or animals carrying giardia in their intestines pass it out in their faeces. The parasite is then spread through poor hygiene or contamination of food, water or soil. Most infections are probably caused by ingesting food or water contaminated by sewage. With a tough outer shell, the parasite can survive for long periods outside the host body. A person only needs to pick up a few giardia cysts for infection to develop.

What are the symptoms?

Not everyone infected with giardia develops symptoms. The symptoms can persist for several weeks. Symptoms usually develop between 1 to 2 weeks after contact with the germ. These may include:

- ◆ Abdominal Pain
- ◆ Bloating
- ◆ Diarrhoea
- ◆ Nausea
- ◆ Vomiting
- ◆ Loss of appetite
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Low grade fever

How does it spread?

Giardia can infect both humans and animals. It can cause diarrhoea in very young animals including calves, lambs and deer, mostly during springtime, as well as in humans of all ages at any time of the year. An infected animal or person may pass a large number of parasite cysts in their faeces, especially if the infection is causing them to have diarrhoea. Swallowing just a few parasite cysts may be enough to cause infection. The risk of water contamination is higher following heavy rainfall, especially in spring and particularly if this coincides with lambing or calving.

Swallowing contaminated recreational waters: Ponds, lakes and rivers may also be contaminated from infected animal droppings, and swimming pool water can become contaminated by an infected swimmer.

Direct contact with infected farm animals (even if they do not appear ill), e.g. during visits to farms and wildlife parks, children are often encouraged to touch young animals such as calves and lambs.

Touching contaminated objects e.g. boots or clothes, without washing hands afterwards.

Contact with someone who is infected, especially if they have vomiting and diarrhoea. The illness spreads more easily among children because they are less likely to wash their hands after using the toilet.

Eating and drinking contaminated food, particularly unpasteurized milk, undercooked meat and offal (liver, kidneys, and heart). Fruit and vegetables can become contaminated from a polluted water source or from contact with manure or farm slurry

Risk of infection is generally increased if **not washing hands before eating and after using the toilet**, particularly after being in the presence of animals.

Can I prevent infection?

The following steps can reduce the risk of contracting or spreading giardia:

1. Always wash your hands.

Regular, thorough hand washing with soap and warm water is essential and should be done

.Before:

- Food handling & cooking
- Eating
- Feeding young children, the elderly or ill individuals
- Departing a farm or wildlife park even if there is no contact with animals.

After:

- Using the toilet
- Changing nappies
- Handling animals
- Handling raw meat or poultry

2. Don't drink untreated water from rivers and streams. If only untreated water is available, the water should be brought to the boil before drinking. Boiling destroys the parasite.

3. Avoid swimming pools until 2 weeks after the last episode of diarrhoea to avoid spreading the infection to other swimmers.

Patients with poor immunity

Patients with poor immunity may be advised by their doctor not to drink unboiled tap water to achieve additional protection. Wells are at risk of being contaminated if they have not been properly installed, have cracks in the casing or are too shallow. People who have an impaired immune response, whether congenital or acquired due to illness or drug treatment should never drink unboiled tap water. If you are unsure whether your condition merits this advice, you should check with your doctor. Bringing the water to the boil is adequate to destroy the parasite. Prolonged boiling is not necessary. The advice is that water that has been boiled is safe to use for drinking, bathing, brushing your teeth (unless a lot of tap water is swallowed during brushing, then use water that has been boiled), washing clothes, dishes and flushing toilets. Water which has been boiled and allowed to cool, should be stored in clean containers in the fridge.

Bottled water varies in its risk of being contaminated with the parasite, though so far there have been no reports of giardia in bottled water causing illness in the UK.