



Giardiasis

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What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a diarrhea illness caused by a microscopic parasite, *giardia intestinalis*. Once infected, the parasite lives in the intestine and is passed in feces. The parasite is protected by an outer shell and can survive outside the body and in the environment for months.

How do you get giardiasis?

Giardia is found on surfaces or in soil, food or water that has been contaminated with the feces of infected humans or animals. You can become infected after swallowing the parasite picked up from surfaces contaminated with feces from an infected person or animal, by drinking water or using ice made from contaminated surfaces, by swallowing contaminated recreational water, and by eating uncooked food contaminated with giardia. Contact with an infected person has also been reported to transmit the parasite.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

Symptoms of giardiasis include diarrhea, greasy stools, stomach or abdominal cramps, and nausea. Some people with giardia infection have no symptoms at all.

How soon do symptoms occur?

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin one to three weeks (average seven days) after becoming infected.

How long do symptoms last?

In otherwise healthy persons, symptoms of giardiasis may last two to six weeks. Occasionally, symptoms last longer.

How long is giardiasis contagious?

Persons with giardiasis are contagious throughout the course of the infection.

How is giardiasis treated?

If you think you may have giardiasis, contact your health care provider, as there are several prescription drugs available to treat the infection. Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids while ill. Rapid fluid loss from diarrhea can be especially life threatening to infants. Therefore, parents should talk to their health care provider about fluid replacement therapy options for infants.

How can you prevent giardiasis?

- Practice good hygiene.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after using the restroom, after changing a diaper, after handling animals or their toys, leashes or feces, and before handling or eating food.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds and streams.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Avoid eating uncooked food when traveling to countries with minimal water treatment and sanitation systems.

Those with giardiasis should not return to work or school until 24 hours after symptoms are gone. Do not allow children to swim while they have diarrhea and for one week after diarrhea stops.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County
Health Department Epidemiology Office at
316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County
website at
www.sedgwickcounty.org.