



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Giardiasis

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an intestinal illness caused by the parasite, *Giardia lamblia*. The parasite can be found in the stools of infected humans and animals (dogs, cats, beavers, rodents). People who drink untreated surface water from ponds, lakes and streams have a higher risk of getting giardiasis. Travelers and persons in institutional settings or day care centers where children are not toilet-trained also have a higher risk of getting giardiasis.

How do you get it?

You get giardiasis by eating or drinking food or water contaminated with human or animal stool containing the parasite or its eggs. The parasite is spread through person-to-person contact. It is not spread by coughing or sneezing.

What are the symptoms of giardiasis?

The symptoms of giardiasis include frequent, loose, pale, greasy stools (often foul smelling), with gas, bloating, cramps, fatigue, and weight loss. Fever is usually not present, and many people infected with *Giardia* may have no symptoms at all.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms of giardiasis normally begin 1 to 3 weeks after becoming infected. In otherwise healthy individuals, symptoms may last 2 to 6 weeks, occasionally longer.

What is the treatment for giardiasis?

A doctor can prescribe medicine to treat giardiasis. Often a repeat course of the same medication will be needed to get rid of the infection. Some individuals may get better on their own without treatment.

For how long is a person contagious?

A person with the disease is contagious for the entire time they are infected, which may last many months.

If you get it once, can you get it again?

Yes. Being infected with *Giardia* does not seem to protect you from getting infected again.

Should a person with giardiasis stay home from work or school?

Food handlers, day care and health care workers, and preschool-aged children who have diarrhea should stay away from work and school until the diarrhea stops.

How can you keep from getting it?

Do not drink untreated water directly from ponds, lakes, and streams. If you are not sure about the safety of drinking water, you should drink bottled water or boil tap water for at least one minute. If boiling is not possible, use a filter that has been tested and rated by National Safety Foundation (NSF) Standard 53 or NSF Standard 58 for cyst and oocyst reduction; filtered tap water will need additional treatment to kill or weaken bacteria and viruses. Chemically treating water with bleach or iodine tablets may not work as well as boiling or filtering.

Wash your hands carefully after using the toilet, and especially before making or eating food.

Wash your hands thoroughly after changing diapers and after cleaning up a pet's waste. After diaper changing, wash the child's hands also.

Keep children away from animal wastes.

For more information:

CDC Giardia:

<https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/index.html>

CDC Drinking Water Treatment:

https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/travel/backcountry_water_treatment.html

Control of Communicable Diseases Manual:

<https://www.apha.org/ccdm>