



Food safety advice

Giardia Infection

The Germ

Giardiasis is caused by an infection of *Giardia lamblia*, which is a small parasite that causes diarrhoea if swallowed.

The Illness

In the UK infection is most common in children aged 1 to 5 years with young adults being the next most commonly affected group. Most people have watery frequent and offensive diarrhoea with abdominal cramps and vomiting. Some may have headache, tiredness and fever. Many people can carry the bug without symptoms. The incubation period (the time taken from swallowing the bug to becoming ill) ranges from 5 to 25 days, but is usually around 7 days.



Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made by the detection of Giardia cysts in a faecal specimen submitted to the laboratory. A patient found to have a Giardia infection may be contacted by an officer from the Environmental Health Team or Control of Infection Nurse from Public Health England, to help identify the most likely source of the infection and to offer advice to help limit further spread.

Spread of the illness

Animals: infection is found in farm animals and pets. Animals are rarely the source of infection in people, though some wild and domestic animals can be infected. Giardia caught from a human source is more infectious than from animals.

Person to person: this usually happens within families, nurseries or day care centres via faecal oral route, especially where there is a breakdown in personal hygiene.

Water: Giardia can be found in untreated water supplies, rivers and lakes. Mains drinking water is rarely a source of infection. It is often associated with travel abroad and the consumption of un-chlorinated or natural water or swimming in contaminated waters.



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Treatment

The infection can be treated by an antimicrobial treatment that your GP may prescribe you. You should also ensure you drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration.

Prevention of spread

As with all gastrointestinal infections risk of spread is greatest while the person still has symptoms of diarrhoea and vomiting. As a general rule people may return to work or school 48 hours after their symptoms have stopped. Attention is needed to good personal hygiene especially washing your hands thoroughly after visiting the toilet, changing nappies and before preparing food.

Care should be taken when travelling abroad, where there is poor sanitation and drinking water may not be pure. Avoid drinking or swimming in untreated water. Children on educational farm visits should be carefully supervised to ensure hand washing after handling farm animals and before eating.

Keep any child suffering from vomiting or diarrhoea off school, playgroup, nursery and avoid swimming until 48 hours after they are completely well.