

## GIARDIASIS

## WHAT IS GIARDIASIS?

- Giardiasis is an infection mainly of the small intestine caused by the parasite *Giardia lamblia*. Giardiasis has been reported in humans and in a variety of animals.
- Giardiasis can affect anyone; however, it is more common in infants, young children and adults aged from 20–40 years.
- Giardiasis is a notifiable condition in NSW. Laboratories confirming diagnosis must notify public health units, who take action to prevent further spread of infection. All notifications are confidential.

## HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- The giardia organism is present in the faeces of infected humans and animals. Infection occurs when a person comes into contact with faecal matter and ingests the parasite.
- Transmission is most likely to occur if hands are not washed after going to the toilet or after changing nappies; by drinking contaminated water; by handling infected animals; and, in rare cases, through eating contaminated food.
- Transmission most often occurs through person-to-person contact, in settings such as households and child care centres.
- Transmission can occur in sexual practices that include contact with faecal matter.
- A person is most infectious while they are ill and passing the organism in their stools (which may occur for months).

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

- The most common symptoms of giardiasis are diarrhoea, stomach cramps, bloating, nausea, loose and pale greasy stools, fatigue, and weight loss.
- Some people have no symptoms, however they can still pass the disease to others.
- The first signs of the illness will appear between 3–25 days (average 7–10 days) after a person becomes infected.
- Most people who are otherwise healthy recover in 4–6 weeks. Occasionally, symptoms last for longer periods.

## HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

- Giardiasis can only be accurately diagnosed through an examination of the faeces, by a test that

is ordered by a doctor. See your doctor if you have symptoms.

- It is important for people with diarrhoea to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Prescription drugs, including metronidazole and tinidazole, are available to treat giardiasis.

## THOSE MOST AT RISK

Those most at risk of contracting giardiasis are:

- people in contact with infected children, such as other children, parents, and child care workers;
- people who drink contaminated water, such as hikers and campers.

## HOW IS IT PREVENTED?

To avoid catching giardiasis:

- always wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after: using the toilet, handling animals, changing nappies, other exposure to faecal matter, working in the garden; and before preparing food and drinks;
- do not drink untreated water from rivers, streams, lakes, dams and tanks. Boiling water from these sources for one minute will kill giardia and other parasites. Water purification tablets may kill giardia, but may not kill cryptosporidium. Some water filters may also remove these parasites;
- avoid consuming unboiled tap water and uncooked foods when travelling in countries where the water supply may be unsafe.

## TO AVOID SPREADING GIARDIASIS:

- Keep small children who have diarrhoea home from preschool, child care, playgroups, or swimming pools, until their diarrhoea has completely stopped.

If you have giardiasis, while you are infectious:

- do not prepare food or drink for others;
- do not use swimming pools;
- do not share linen, towels and eating utensils with others.

*For further information please contact your local Public Health Unit, Community Health Centre, or doctor.*

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