

## FACT SHEET

# ***GIARDIA* Infection; Giardiasis**

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### **What is giardiasis (also called *Giardia* infection)?**

Giardiasis is a gut infection caused by a germ called *Giardia lamblia*. It is a common cause of diarrhea in the US. Over three hundred cases of giardiasis are reported each year in Iowa.

### **What are the symptoms of giardiasis?**

People with *Giardia* infection may experience mild or severe diarrhea, stomach cramps, bloating and fatigue. Diarrhea may last several weeks or months and might cause weight loss. Fever is rare. However, some people infected with *Giardia* do not become ill. Many young children have no symptoms. (Children in child care centers are often infected, but do not need treatment unless they get diarrhea).

### **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Diarrhea usually begins 7 - 10 days, but it can range from 3 - 25 days after infection with *Giardia*.

### **How is *Giardia* infection spread?**

*Giardia* germs are passed in the feces of an infected person or animal and may contaminate water or food. The disease can spread from person to person in child care centers or other settings where people sometimes don't wash their hands well enough. People who go camping or hunting can get giardiasis by drinking untreated water.

### **Who gets *Giardia* infection?**

Anyone can become infected with *Giardia*, but children are infected more often than adults. It occurs frequently in hospitals, prisons, or child cares. Persons who travel overseas or who drink untreated water also have a higher risk of giardiasis.

### **For how long is a person infectious?**

An infected person can spread *Giardia* for a few weeks to months. Treatment may shorten this length of time.

### **What is the treatment for this illness?**

Antibiotics are often prescribed by doctors to treat *Giardia* infection. However, some persons may recover on their own without treatment. Not everyone infected with *Giardia* needs to be treated.

### **Do infected people need to be excluded from school, work, or child care?**

Since *Giardia* germs are found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea should not go to school or work. However, they may return when the diarrhea stops. Everyone should wash his or her hands each time after using the toilet.

### **What can be done to help prevent the spread of *Giardia*?**

1. Carefully wash hands thoroughly after using the toilet or handling dirty diapers.
2. Properly dispose of sewage so water sources will not be infected.
3. Do not drink water that has not been properly treated. When camping, treat your drinking water by boiling or by using "purification tablets" before drinking.