

# Giardiasis

## FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County  
Health Department

### What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a disease caused by a microscopic parasite that causes diarrheal illness. The Giardia parasite gets into the intestines, and lays eggs, which are then passed in feces via a bowel movement.

### What are the symptoms?

- Many loose, watery bowel movements that are yellow, frothy and smell worse than usual
- Diarrhea alternating with constipation
- Gas
- Greasy stools that tend to float
- Stomach cramps
- Upset stomach or nausea/vomiting
- Dehydration

Symptoms usually appear 1-3 weeks after becoming infected. Symptoms may last between 2-6 weeks, occasionally longer. Medication can help decrease amount of time symptoms last.

### How is it treated?

If you have this disease, you will be given medicine to take. **Take all of the medicine as prescribed, even if you start to feel better.** If you or anyone in your family is diagnosed with this disease, **all** members of the family should be checked by your doctor for Giardia. It is also important to stay well hydrated, especially infants and pregnant women.

### How is it spread?

People infected with the parasite who do not wash their hands after having a bowel movement or after changing the soiled diapers of an infected child can spread Giardia to others. Drinking contaminated water, such as untreated water from lakes and streams, can also transmit Giardia. Eating uncooked food that contains Giardia organisms can lead to infection as well.

### Adults with Giardiasis should:

- Not prepare food.
- Wash hands after using the bathroom.
- Prevent contact with feces during sex.
- Stay out of pools and lakes if you have diarrhea.

### Children with Giardiasis should:

- Wash their hands after using the toilet or being diapered.
- Dispose of diapers in a tied plastic bag inside a tightly closed garbage can.
- Stay away from other children until they are well.
- Stay out of pools and lakes if they have diarrhea.

### How is it prevented?

- Wash hands after using bathroom and before preparing food.
- Avoid water (drinking and recreational) that may be contaminated.
- Avoid eating food that may be contaminated.
- Use precautions while cleaning up after ill pets and people.
- Prompt and proper treatment.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*