

Public Health England
East Midlands Health Protection
Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire,
Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland
Seaton House
City Link
London Road
Nottingham
NG2 4LA
www.gov.uk/phe



Giardia



**If you have any further questions,
please contact:**

Environmental Health,
East Lindsey District Council,
Tedder Hall, Manby Park,
Manby, Louth, Lincolnshire LN11 8UP

Tel: 01507 601111

E: commercial.team@e-lindsey.gov.uk

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This leaflet contains information about Giardia
- what it is and how it affects people

1 What is Giardia?

Giardia is a parasite, (known as a protozoan), that causes an infection called giardiasis. Giardiasis occurs in people and also cattle, domesticated and wild animals.

2 Who is at risk?

Anyone can get giardiasis, but it is particularly common in children under 5 years. People who care for, or work with children are more at risk. Recreational water use and close contact with animals can increase the risk of getting giardiasis.

3 How do you get giardiasis?

Giardia is found in lakes, streams and rivers, untreated or contaminated water and sometimes in swimming pools.

You can get giardiasis directly from another person or animal by touching faeces, (for example when changing a nappy) and swimming in, or drinking contaminated water. Occasionally you can be infected by eating and drinking contaminated food, particularly where there is poor hygiene or sanitation.

4 How can you avoid getting giardiasis?

- Pay particular attention to personal hygiene and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water:
 - before preparing and eating food
 - after handling raw food
 - after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
 - after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals and especially when handling faeces
 - after recreational water use – particularly inland rivers, streams, ponds and lakes
 - during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals
 - eating only in designated areas
- Do not drink untreated water, or use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Always wash and/or peel fruits and vegetables before eating them
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use when there is a case of diarrhoea in the house

- Wash all soiled clothes and linen on as hot a machine wash as possible. Don't share towels

5 What are the symptoms of giardiasis and how long do they last?

Watery diarrhoea, which may be profuse and foul smelling, is often accompanied by nausea. Vomiting and abdominal pain may also be present. Prolonged diarrhoea and weight loss can occur in cases of giardiasis. The diarrhoea can last days and into weeks and even after the profuse diarrhoea has stopped, the organism can continue to be excreted.

If you have concerns about your health contact NHS Direct on 0845 4647, visit their website <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>.

6 How do you treat giardiasis?

If giardiasis is diagnosed you may be offered a course of antibiotics. Most people with a healthy immune system will recover within around a month.

It is important to drink plenty of fluids as diarrhoea or vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution or may consider treatment in more persistent cases.

7 Do I need to stay off work or school?

Yes. While you are ill and have symptoms you are infectious. You should not return to work or school until you have been free from diarrhoea and/or vomiting for 48 hours.

You should tell your employer you have had giardiasis if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health, or if you handle food.

More information about the Health Protection Agency and giardiasis is available on our website at <http://www.hpa.org.uk>. If you have any further questions, please contact your family doctor.

8 The Health Protection Agency and Giardia

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