



MAY 3, 2024

About *Giardia*

KEY POINTS

- *Giardia* is a tiny parasite (germ) that causes diarrhea.
- *Giardia* can spread easily from one person to another or through water, food, surfaces, or objects.
- A healthcare provider can prescribe medicine to treat illness caused by *Giardia*.



What it is

Giardia duodenalis (*Giardia* for short) is a parasite. Illness caused by *Giardia* is called giardiasis.

Giardia lives in the gut of infected people and animals and comes out of the body in poop. *Giardia* can survive for weeks to months outside the body (for example, in soil).

In the United States, more people get sick from *Giardia* than from any other parasite that lives in the gut. Every year, more than 1 million people get sick from *Giardia*.

Giardia is found in every region of the United States and around the world.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually begin by having diarrhea 2 to 5 times per day and feeling more and more tired.

Short-term symptoms include:

- Diarrhea
- Gas
- Smelly, greasy poop that can float
- Stomach cramps or pain
- Upset stomach or nausea
- Dehydration (loss of fluids)

Symptoms usually begin 1 to 2 weeks after becoming infected with *Giardia* and last for 2 to 6 weeks. Occasionally, people have long-term symptoms that can last for years.

Keep Reading:

[Symptoms of *Giardia* Infection](#)

Who is at risk

Anyone can get sick from *Giardia*. However, **children are more likely to get sick** than adults.

You are more likely to get sick if you:

- Are in close contact with someone who is sick from *Giardia*, especially in childcare settings
- Are in an area with limited access to safe drinking water
- Drink [untreated water](#) from springs, lakes, rivers, or shallow wells
- Swallow water from pools, splash pads, lakes, or rivers (for example, while swimming)
- Have a weakened immune system
- Have contact with poop during sex
- Have contact with infected animals or animal environments contaminated with poop

How it spreads

You can get sick if you swallow *Giardia*.

Giardia germs are in poop, so anything that gets contaminated by poop can potentially spread the germs. *Giardia* can spread from one person to another or through contaminated water, food, surfaces, or objects.

Giardia spreads easily; swallowing just a few *Giardia* germs can make you sick.

Keep Reading:

[Giardia Infection: Causes and How It Spreads](#)

Prevention

You can take steps to avoid getting or spreading *Giardia*:

- Wash your hands with soap and water at [key times](#).
- Avoid swallowing water while swimming.
- [Boil or filter](#) water from lakes, springs, or rivers before drinking or preparing food with it.
- Wait to have sex for several weeks after you or your partner no longer have diarrhea.
- Avoid touching animal poop.
- Clean and disinfect areas where a person or pet recently had diarrhea.



Boil lake or river water for at least 1 minute to kill *Giardia* (at elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for 3 minutes)

Keep Reading:
[Giardia Infection Prevention and Control](#)

Diagnosis

Contact a healthcare provider if you think you may be sick from *Giardia*. They will ask you to give stool (poop) samples to see if *Giardia* is making you sick.

Keep Reading:
[Testing and Diagnosis for Giardia Infection](#)

Treatment and recovery

Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to treat illness caused by *Giardia*.

If you have diarrhea, drink a lot of water or other fluids to avoid dehydration (loss of fluids).

Keep Reading:
[Treatment of Giardia Infection](#)

Animal transmission

Although animals can spread *Giardia* to people, you are unlikely to get a *Giardia* infection from dogs or cats. The type of *Giardia* that makes people sick is usually not the same type that makes dogs and cats sick.

Keep Reading:
[About Giardia and Pets](#)

Resources

Gerdes, M. E., Miko, S., Kunz, J. M., Hannapel, E. J., Hlavsa, M. C., Hughes, M. J., Stuckey, M. J., Francois Watkins, L. K., Cope, J. R., Yoder, J. S., Hill, V. R., & Collier, S. A. (2023). [Estimating Waterborne Infectious Disease Burden by Exposure Route, United States, 2014](#) [↗](#). *Emerging infectious diseases*, 29(7), 1357–1366.

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
[National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases \(NCEZID\)](#)