



Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

For more information, call your local CMDHD branch office:

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www.cmdhd.org

Giardiasis

What is Giardiasis?

Giardiasis is a disease caused by a “bug” (parasite) that gets into the intestines. The giardia bug lays eggs that are passed out of the body with the bowel movement of infected humans or animals, both wild and domestic. These eggs can be spread to others by infected people who do not wash their hands after having bowel movements and/or after changing soiled diapers from an infected infant. Outbreaks can occur from swallowing fecally contaminated drinking or recreational waters (lakes, rivers, ponds, etc.).

What are the symptoms of Giardiasis?

A person with this disease may have:

- Diarrhea (many loose bowel movements that are yellow, frothy and smell worse than usual)
- A lot of gas/bloating
- Stomach aches
- Little or no appetite
- A fever
- A headache
- Fatigue

A person with this disease may also vomit (throw up) frequently. It is common to have diarrhea one day and constipation the next day. The signs may come and go. Some people may have the disease with no signs at all. The only way to find out if you have this disease is to see your doctor. The doctor may ask you to bring a bowel movement to be checked for the giardia bug.

What should I do if I have Giardiasis?

If you do have this disease, the doctor will give you a special medicine to take. Make sure that you take all of the medicine. **DO NOT STOP TAKING THE MEDICINE EVEN IF YOU START TO FEEL BETTER.** Check back with your doctor after the medicine is gone to make sure that you are cured. Other family members may need to be checked for the bug.

Make sure that ALL members of your family wash their hands after having bowel movements or after changing soiled diapers and before preparing or eating food. Prompt and proper treatment will help to stop the spread of the giardia bug to other family members and will speed up your cure.

How can I prevent infection by Giardia?

- In childcare centers, handwashing by staff and children should be emphasized, especially after toilet use or handling of soiled diapers. When an outbreak is suspected, the local health department should be contacted to investigate and identify for treatment all children with symptoms, childcare workers and infected family members. Persons with diarrhea should be excluded from the childcare center until the diarrhea stops. Treatment and exclusion of symptom-free carriers is not recommended.
- Backpackers, campers, and persons likely to be exposed to contaminated water should avoid drinking directly from streams. Boiling of water will kill the infective bugs capable of producing disease.