



Giardia

Consult the health department before posting or distributing the parent/guardian fact sheet.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Giardia lamblia, a parasite.

Symptoms

Diarrhea (possibly ongoing or recurring), stools that tend to float, gas, stomach cramps, bloating, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, and weight loss. Children who are infected often show no symptoms. Illness usually lasts 2 to 6 weeks.

Spread

Giardia parasites leave the body through the stool of an infected person and enter another person when hands, food or objects (such as toys) contaminated with stool are placed in the mouth. Spread can occur when people do not wash their hands after using the toilet or changing diapers. Spread can occur whether or not a person feels sick.

Incubation

It takes 1 to 2 weeks from the time a person is exposed until symptoms develop.

Contagious period

As long as *Giardia* parasites are present in the stool, a person can pass the germs to other people. *Giardia* can be present in stool for several weeks or months after symptoms have stopped.

Exclusion

Childcare: Children infected with *Giardia* who have symptoms should be excluded until 24 hours after diarrhea has stopped. Children who have *Giardia* in their stools but who have no symptoms do not need to be excluded.

School: None, unless the child is not feeling well and/or has diarrhea and needs to use the bathroom frequently. Exclusion may be necessary during outbreaks.

Anyone with *Giardia* should not go in lakes, pools, splash pads, waterparks, or hot tubs until after diarrhea has stopped.

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Staff with *Giardia* may be restricted from working in food service. Call your local health department to see if these restrictions apply.

Diagnosis

Recommend that parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has symptoms of giardiasis. There is a lab test to detect *Giardia* in the stool.

Treatment

Treatment is available.

Prevention

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after using the toilet, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food.
- Clean and disinfect diapering areas and potty chairs after each use. Clean and disinfect bathroom toilets, sinks, and toys at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Clean and disinfect mouthed toys, objects, or surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Avoid swallowing water when in lakes, pools, waterparks, or hot tubs.

Disinfecting solutions

Products that contain quaternary ammonia compounds (“quats”) are most effective for inactivating *Giardia*. Mechanically cleaning surfaces by scrubbing with soap or detergent and water will also help reduce germs. Contact your local health department for disinfection recommendations if an outbreak of giardiasis occurs.

For more information, call Hennepin County Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

Hennepin County Public Health
Epidemiology
612-543-5230
epi-envhlth@hennepin.us

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