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## What is it?

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Giardiasis is an infection of the bowel (guts) caused by a parasite. It is seen throughout the world but more in areas where water is not properly treated. In Scotland it is reported more in summer months.

*Giardia lamblia* (also known as *Giardia intestinalis* or *Giardia duodenalis*) is the parasite that causes giardiasis.

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## Who can get it?

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Anyone can get giardiasis. People most at risk are:

- ❖ Children attending child care centres and adults in contact with these children
- ❖ People in close contact with children or adults who have giardiasis
- ❖ People travelling to foreign countries where the water supply and food may be contaminated with *Giardia*
- ❖ People drinking not properly treated surface water
- ❖ Men who have sex with other men

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## How does it spread?

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*Giardia* are passed in faeces (stools) of infected humans, wild animals, and pets. This can happen over a period of weeks to months, even if the person has no symptoms. The parasite is spread from person to person by close contact with someone who has the organism (for example, contact with children in nappies). Faeces of humans or animals also can contaminate lakes, reservoirs, and streams, and giardiasis can result when people drink the untreated water.

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## What are the symptoms?

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Symptoms to look for may include:

- ❖ Foul smelling, greasy diarrhoea
- ❖ Stomach cramps
- ❖ Bloating and gas
- ❖ Nausea (feeling sick) & tiredness
- ❖ Weight loss

Symptoms usually begin 7 to 10 days after exposure to *Giardia*. It can start as early as 3 days or as late as 25 days)

The parasite can live happily in the human gut for a long time so many people with giardiasis do not have any symptoms.

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## Can it be treated?

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Yes. Treatment with antibiotics and specific medications may shorten the illness. It is important to take the full course.

Close contacts in the same household may need to be treated.

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## **Can it be prevented?**

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Yes by taking the following action:

- ❖ Wash hands after using the toilet, after handling nappies, before preparing food or drink, and before eating
- ❖ Avoid drinking improperly treated water, for example, when camping or during foreign travel
- ❖ Keep children with diarrhoea out of swimming pools
- ❖ In childcare centres, careful hand washing among staff and children is very important

In most cases it is generally advised to wait until 48 hours after last having diarrhoea or sickness before returning to work or school/nursery. This may be longer depending on special circumstances. The public health department will provide advice about this.

A private water supply should be well looked after with animals unable to contaminate it. Dirty brown water after heavy rainfall should be boiled before drinking or another water source used.

The Environmental Health Officer or Department of Public Health can offer advice if concerned about a water supply.

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## **Is there anything else?**

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This infection can only be controlled if we better understand how it was passed on. This may help to stop others getting infected. Your help with this is important.

A nurse or doctor from the Public Health Department or an Environmental Health Officer will be in touch to find out more information about the time leading up to the illness. They will want to know about who else may be at risk.

### **Need further advice or information?**

- ❖ NHS Inform [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 [www.nhs24.co.uk](http://www.nhs24.co.uk)
- ❖ [www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk)
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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