

giardia

Prevent this food and water-borne disease.



Giardia (pronounced gee-ah-dee-ah) is a parasite found in the gut of humans and animals such as cattle, sheep, cats, dogs, rats and possums.

It is passed on in the faeces (poo, tūtae) of infected animals and humans.

Giardia is widespread in New Zealand. The parasites can live in the environment for long periods, especially in lakes, rivers, streams and roof water.

How does a person become infected?

People become infected when they swallow the parasites. This may be from contaminated water and food, or from contact with infected animals or humans.

The signs and symptoms of the illness

Giardia may cause:

- foul-smelling diarrhoea
- stomach cramps and abdominal pain
- nausea and vomiting
- weight loss
- bloating
- slight fever
- headache
- fatigue.

Symptoms appear between three and 25 days (usually seven to 10 days) after the person is infected.

The person will usually be ill for three to four days and without treatment may remain infectious for months.

During this time the person can spread the parasite to other people, even when there are no symptoms.



Treatment of giardia infection

- For advice, testing and treatment you will need to visit your doctor.
- The doctor may request a faecal specimen and give you a specimen jar, as a laboratory test may be needed.
- Your doctor will prescribe medication to treat the infection.
- Drink plenty of safe fluids while the diarrhoea lasts, to prevent dehydration. Follow your doctor's instructions.
- Go back to your doctor if your child is not drinking.
- If you have giardia infection the doctor is required to report this to the Medical Officer of Health of the Public Health Service (PHS). The PHS may contact you to find out how you picked up the parasite. This helps to prevent more outbreaks of the illness.

Time off work or school

Usually people can return to work and children aged 5 years and older can return to school when the symptoms are gone. However, as giardia infection is a notifiable disease you will need to check with your doctor or Public Health Service first.

Those working with food, or employed in a hospital, rest home or early childhood centre are required to stay away from work until 48 hours after symptoms are gone. Children aged under 5 years also need to be without symptoms for 48 hours before returning to early childhood centres.

How to avoid getting giardia infection and passing it on to others

Washing hands

Wash your hands thoroughly by using plenty of soap, cleaning under fingernails, rinsing hands well and drying on a clean towel:

- before and after preparing food
- after going to the toilet or changing a baby's nappy
- after caring for people with giardia
- after playing or working with animals.

If you have giardia infection, avoid preparing food for other people. If you must do so, wash your hands carefully first.

Water in rural areas

- Drinking water taken from the roof, rivers, lakes, etc. should be boiled for one minute or an approved filter (Standard AS/NZS4348: 1995) should be used.
- When using roof water for drinking, clean spouting regularly and keep roofs clear of bird and animal droppings.
- To prevent animals from getting on to the roof, avoid placing TV aerials on the roof for birds to perch on and avoid planting trees close to the house.

When you visit a swimming pool:

- take your children to the toilet and wash hands before they swim
- before entering the pool, shower yourself and your children using soap (particularly in the area around the bottom)
- ensure babies and young children swim in tight-fitting togs, not nappies, to prevent faecal matter getting into the water. Wash your hands after changing the baby
- report any faecal accidents (poo in the water) to the pool attendant immediately.

No one should go swimming in a pool if they have diarrhoea. Wait until at least two weeks after the symptoms have gone.

Help keep the environment free of giardia when tramping and camping

- Use toilets when they are provided.
- When no toilets are provided, bury toilet waste and paper. Make sure you bury it at least 50 metres away from any water source such as rivers and lakes.
- Do not wash your hands directly in the water. Collect water, wash your hands in it and then drain it into the ground away from the water source.



Washing hands in **hot soapy water** and drying them on a clean towel will help **prevent the spread of giardia.**



This resource is available from www.healthed.govt.nz
or the Authorised Provider at your local DHB.



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