



What

Giardiasis is a diarrheal disease caused by the microscopic parasite *Giardia duodenalis* (commonly known as “Giardia”). It is transmitted through the fecal-oral route. After a person or animal ingests *Giardia* cysts through contaminated food or water, the cysts release trophozoites in the intestines. These trophozoites absorb nutrients from the infected person, and some transform back into cysts, which are then released in the stool.



Who

Giardia occurs worldwide and is primarily spread in areas with poor sanitary conditions. Certain underlying conditions can increase the risk of contracting the disease. High-risk groups include infants, immunocompromised individuals, and patients with weakened immune systems. Additionally, people who have contact with feces during sexual activities are also at increased risk.



Where and when

Giardiasis is an important cause of water- and foodborne-related diarrhea and can lead to outbreaks in daycare centers as well as illness in international travelers. However, it is not a very common cause of traveler’s diarrhea.

Prevention

Preventing giardiasis involves measures similar to those for preventing traveler’s diarrhea, including sanitation control interventions and water purification. Hand hygiene with soap and water is preferred over alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Environmental disinfection and cleaning may be necessary if surfaces are contaminated. There is no vaccine available for the prevention of giardiasis



Treatment

Diagnosis of giardiasis can be made by testing stool samples. Effective treatments are available. In some cases, infections are self-limited. Treatment of asymptomatic individuals may be recommended to prevent further transmission.

Symptoms

About 50% of *Giardia* infections remain asymptomatic. Symptoms of acute disease typically develop after an incubation period of 7-14 days and may include diarrhea, foul-smelling and fatty stools, abdominal cramps, flatulence, nausea, and weight loss. Chronic giardiasis has less pronounced symptoms and can either follow the acute phase or develop without any prior acute illness.



In case of infection

People with giardiasis who do not receive treatment typically begin to feel better and have no symptoms within 2 to 6 weeks. However, in some cases, symptoms may recur after several days or weeks. Occasionally, giardiasis can lead to long-term complications such as reactive arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome, and recurring diarrhea that can persist for years. In children, severe or chronic giardiasis may delay physical and mental growth, slow development, and cause malnutrition with specific nutrient deficiencies.