



Giardiasis

What is it?

Giardiasis, commonly known as 'Beaver Fever', is an infection of the upper small intestine caused by the parasite *Giardia lamblia*, which occurs as cysts in the feces. *Giardia* occurs worldwide and affects children more often than adults. It is more common in areas of poor sanitation and in institutions where children are not toilet trained, such as child care centres. In Canada and the US, *Giardia* occurs more frequently from July to October in children under five and adults aged 25 to 39.

How is it spread?

Giardia lamblia is mainly spread by hand-to-mouth transfer of cysts from the feces of an infected person, particularly in child care centres and institutions. It is also spread by ingesting contaminated water that hasn't gone through a filtering system. Chlorine treatment does not destroy the *G. lamblia* organism. Having anal intercourse, swimming in contaminated water, eating contaminated food and having a child in child care are other ways that *G. lamblia* is spread.

What are the symptoms and when do they occur?

Symptoms appear three to 25 days or more (usually seven to 10 days) from the time of contact with the organism. Symptoms can include acute to chronic diarrhea, abdominal cramps, bloating, frequent loose and pale greasy stools, feeling tired, inability to absorb fats and fat-soluble vitamins, and weight loss. Symptoms and symptom severity vary; some people may not experience any symptoms.

When is it infectious?

A person is infectious for the entire time of the infection, often months.

How can I protect myself and prevent the spread?

To prevent spread to yourself and others the following measures should be practiced:

- Practice thorough hand washing with soap and warm water especially before handling food, before eating, after using the toilet and after handling diapers from an infected person.
- Filter (less than five micron filter) public water supplies exposed to fecal contamination. Boil water rapidly for one minute for emergency water use.
- Do not prepare food for others if you are infected with *G. lamblia*.

Recommended Absence

Persons who are food handlers, persons who work in hospitals and other institutions where people live, or persons who attend child care centres should be absent while symptoms are present.

G. lamblia must be reported to the Medical Officer of Health as required by the Health Protection and Promotion Act.

For more information, please contact a member of Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit's Infectious Disease Team.

Updated March 2022

