



Giardia infection (giardiasis)

- **Giardia infection (giardiasis) is a form of gastroenteritis (gastro).**
- **Symptoms including diarrhoea and stomach cramps usually appear between 7 and 10 days after infection.**
- **Good hygiene can help stop it spreading.**

Giardia infection (giardiasis) is a bowel (gut) infection caused by a tiny parasite called *Giardia lamblia*, also known as *Giardia intestinalis*. The parasite is a single-celled organism that can attach itself in large numbers to the wall of your bowel and interferes with your body's natural absorption of nutrients.

In Western Australia, more than 700 cases of giardiasis are reported each year. More than half of all cases are in infants and children under 5 years of age. However, *Giardia* can infect anybody at any age.

How to do you get Giardia infection?

You can get *Giardia* infection (giardiasis) by putting anything in your mouth that has been directly or indirectly contaminated with animal or human faeces that contain *Giardia*.

Infection most often occurs by:

- swallowing polluted water from rivers, streams, springs, ponds, lakes, swimming pools, spas or the sea
- eating uncooked food, fruit or vegetables that have been contaminated (while growing or afterwards), or have been washed with contaminated water
- touching your mouth after handling

clothing, bedding, toilets, taps, toys or nappy changing tables used by an already infected person

- coming into contact with animals or soils that contain animal faeces
- exposure to faeces through sexual contact.

Although it is less common, food handlers can contaminate cooked food with *Giardia* if they do not wash their hands after going to the toilet.

Who is likely to get it?

Some people are more likely to get *Giardia* infection, including:

- children who are not toilet trained
- healthcare and childcare workers
- international travellers, particularly to or from developing areas
- hikers and campers.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The following signs and symptoms usually appear between 7 and 10 days after infection:

foul smelling greasy or watery diarrhoea

- abdominal (stomach) cramps
- nausea
- fatigue
- bloating
- loss of appetite.



How is it treated?

Consult your doctor for treatment, as prescription medications such as antibiotics are usually required. Chronic infection can last for months to years if left undiagnosed and untreated.

Avoid anti-vomiting or anti-diarrhoeal medications unless a doctor has prescribed or recommended them for you.

While you have the infection

- Drink plenty of fluids such as plain water or oral rehydration drinks (available from a pharmacy).
- Do not go to work until at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Do not handle or prepare food until at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Health care workers, child care workers and food handlers should not attend work until 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- Food handlers working under the Food Standards Code (external site) must follow specific requirements before resuming food handling activities. Please refer to food handlers (external site) for details.
- Keep children home from school until at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.
- People in hospitals, nursing homes and other residential facilities should be nursed in their own room, with a private bathroom until at least 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.

- Immediately remove and wash any clothes or bedding contaminated with vomit or diarrhoea using soap and hot water.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect contaminated surfaces with a bleach-based household cleaner immediately after any episode of vomiting.
- Wait at least 2 weeks after symptoms have ceased before entering a swimming pool, spa, splash park, spray park or water slide.
- Breastfed babies should continue to be breastfed throughout their illness.

How can it be prevented?

To stop the spread of infection:

- Wash hands with soap and water after changing nappies and before preparing or handling food or drinks.
- To wash your hands effectively, lather thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 15 seconds. Dry your hands with a clean single use towel (e.g. paper towel) and turn the tap off with the towel to avoid possible recontamination. See facts about hand hygiene for more information.
- If hand washing facilities are not available then use an alcohol-based gel.
- Supervise children to make sure they wash their hands properly.
- Make sure foods are thoroughly cooked.
- Wash or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
- Do not drink undisinfected water. Be wary of private supplies after flooding or other extreme weather events, especially if the water looks turbid (cloudy).



- Wait at least 2 weeks after symptoms have ceased before entering a swimming pool, spa, splash park, spray park or water slide.
- Keep the water in your swimming pool or spa clean and safe by following good water treatment procedures, especially following any faecal accidents.
- If sexually active, always practice safe sex.

For travellers visiting remote areas of Australia or overseas:

- Always make sure that your drinking water is safe to drink. If you suspect that water you need to drink may be contaminated or untreated, heat it to a rolling boil, then let it cool before drinking.
- Do not consume ice, or drinks prepared with or from ice, unless you know the water the ice has been made from has been properly disinfected and the ice has been hygienically stored and handled.
- Avoid unpasteurised milk, dairy products, ice cream, salads, runny eggs, shellfish, raw food or food washed with tap water that has not been properly disinfected.
- Only consume freshly cooked (hot) foods and beverages, bottled water from sealed containers, canned or tinned food that has been properly stored and fresh fruit and vegetables that you can peel yourself.
- Remember – 'cook it, boil it, peel it, or leave it'.

Where to get help

- See your doctor, nurse or aboriginal health worker
- WA Rheumatic Heart Disease Register and Control Program
- Phone: 1300 622 745 (local call rates from land line only)
- Email: rhd.register@health.wa.gov.au
- Postal address: PO Box 6680, East Perth Business Centre WA 6892

Remember

- Giardia infection (giardiasis) is a form of gastroenteritis (gastro).
- Symptoms including diarrhoea and stomach cramps usually appear between 7 and 10 days after infection.
- Good hygiene can help stop it spreading. Seek medical advice as soon as possible if you suspect you may have ARF so treatment can be.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

Produced by the Communications Directorate © Department of Health 2019

Copyright to this material is vested in the State of Western Australia unless otherwise indicated. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced or re-used for any purposes whatsoever without written permission of the State of Western Australia.