

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

GIARDIASIS

DIRECTION DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

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UNDERSTANDING

Giardiasis is an infection of the intestinal tract. It is caused by “*Giardia lamblia*”, a parasite that is invisible to the naked eye. Most giardiasis patients are symptom-free, although some may complain of frequent, light-coloured, foul-smelling stools, with abdominal cramps and abdominal gas.

WHERE IS THIS PARASITE FOUND ?

Giardia lamblia is often found in water that has been contaminated by domestic or wild animals, for example, in lakes, streams and wells. Humans with the infection shed the organism in their stools, whether they have diarrhea or not. *Giardia* transmission may occur in daycare centers, for example when contaminated hands or objects are brought to the mouth.

HOW MAY A PERSON BE INFECTED BY GIARDIA ?

Via contact with the stools of an infected person or animal :

- Food prepared by a person with Giardiasis in his or her stools can become contaminated if the person is not sufficiently careful about practicing proper hygiene. Similarly, the parasite can contaminate the hands of a person who changes the diapers of an infected baby; any food handled by the person subsequently may then become contaminated, as well
- In daycare centers, the infection may be transmitted from one child to another, especially if the children are still in diapers, or if they have not yet been taught to wash their hands.
- The parasite may also be present in the stools of domestic or wild animals, particularly rodents (rabbits and beavers, for example). A person who has touched infected animals or cleaned out their cages is therefore at risk of acquiring the infection himself or herself.

Via contaminated water :

- By drinking unfiltered water from a lake or stream, or by washing food with such water.
- By drinking unfiltered water while travelling (be wary of ice served in drinks).

Only people with symptoms who have parasites found in their stool need treatment. If left untreated, symptoms can last for several weeks.

HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT THE SPREAD OF GIARDIA INFECTIONS?

- a) You must wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water :
 - After each bowel movement, especially if you have diarrhea, or after changing a child's diaper or touching an animal.
 - Before and after eating, handling food and/or handling cooking utensils.
- b) Cook all meats and poultry products at temperatures high enough to kill bacteria. You can find more information at : https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Publications/MAPAO_guide_consommateur.pdf
- c) Wash knives, other utensils, such as cutting boards, and your hands when switching from one food to another. Clean and disinfect high touched surfaces regularly.
- d) Avoid drinking untreated water (from lakes or streams). If you use well water, insure that it is tested regularly.