



## What is Giardia?

Giardiasis is an infectious diarrhoea disease caused by protozoan parasite, Giardia Lamblia.

### How is it spread?

Infection begins with the ingestion of Giardia cysts. The parasite is transmitted from person to person through contact with infected faeces, either directly (such as between children) or indirectly via contaminated food, water and inanimate objects.

### What are the symptoms?

The usual interval between infection and the onset of acute symptoms ranges from several days to two weeks - usually 7 to 10 days. In most instances, the individual will experience:

- Sudden explosive, watery, foul-smelling diarrhoea
- Excessive gas
- Abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Nausea
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Occasionally fever and vomiting

The symptoms usually last 7-10 days but approximately 50% of infected people have very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.

Occasionally, individuals with weakened immune systems may have the illness for months, or even years, causing recurrent mild or moderate symptoms such as impaired digestion, lactose intolerance, intermittent diarrhoea, tiredness, weakness, and significant weight loss (anorexia).

### Relative frequency of disease

Giardia affects three times more children than adults, possibly because many individuals seem to have a lasting immunity after infection, and also because children do not have well developed personal hygiene. Chronic cases are difficult to treat.



## Prevention

The risk of people contracting Giardia from drinking water supplies can be eliminated by treatment procedures. This involves installing fine filters and a UV sterilisation unit to remove and kill Giardia cysts.

## How can the illness be avoided?

The illness can be avoided by:

1. Thoroughly washing hands
2. Making sure your house is connected to a Council water supply of good quality
3. Eating food which has been thoroughly washed, peeled and/or cooked
4. Keeping children with Giardia away from any childcare facility until they have received medical treatment.

For more information contact a Health Protection Officer at Toi Te Ora Public Health Service, free phone 0800 221 555.