

Giardiasis

Background Information

Giardiasis is a diarrhoeal disease caused by a parasite. It is generally not a serious disease, but is fairly common in the UK. It is often acquired from contaminated water.

Organism

Giardia species

Incidence and Transmission

There are around 3–4000 cases of giardiasis each year in the UK, although many of these are acquired abroad.

The disease is spread via the ingestion of contaminated water or food, or by direct contact with infected animals or humans. Animals that can be infected include pigs, sheep, horses, dog and cats. Giardiasis can be spread from person to person.

Giardiasis is most often caught by drinking contaminated water or ingesting contaminated water during swimming or other water-based recreational activities.

Occupations and processes where Giardiasis may present a risk

Occupational exposure to *Giardia* species may occur in those who:

- are in contact with contaminated water; or
- are in contact with infected animals;

Occupations where there may be a risk of occupationally acquired giardiasis include:

- workers in outdoor leisure industries in contact with water, eg watersports instructors;
- sewage and waste water workers;
- farmers;
- healthcare and care workers; and
- veterinary surgeons.

Clinical Information

The incubation period is usually 1–3 weeks.

The main symptoms are diarrhoea and abdominal cramps, which generally last for up to two weeks.

Anyone suffering from diarrhoea for more than one week should visit their GP for a diagnostic test. Giardiasis can be treated with antibiotics.

Control

The following control measures reduce the risk of infection:

- Good occupational hygiene practices should be followed, especially washing with warm water and soap.
- Cuts and abrasions should be covered with waterproof plasters.
- Suitable protective clothing should be worn.
- A suitable disinfectant should be used.

Further Information

[Public Health England – Giardiasis](#)

[NHS Choices – Giardiasis](#)