FACTSHEET

**GIARDIASIS**

**WHAT IS GIARDIASIS?**
- Giardiasis is an infection mainly of the small intestine caused by the parasite *Giardia lamblia*. Giardiasis has been reported in humans and in a variety of animals.
- Giardiasis can affect anyone; however, it is more common in infants, young children and adults aged from 20–40 years.
- Giardiasis is a notifiable condition in NSW. Laboratories confirming diagnosis must notify public health units, who take action to prevent further spread of infection. All notifications are confidential.

**HOW IS IT SPREAD?**
- The *giardia* organism is present in the faeces of infected humans and animals. Infection occurs when a person comes into contact with faecal matter and ingests the parasite.
- Transmission is most likely to occur if hands are not washed after going to the toilet or after changing nappies; by drinking contaminated water; by handling infected animals; and, in rare cases, through eating contaminated food.
- Transmission most often occurs through person-to-person contact, in settings such as households and child care centres.
- Transmission can occur in sexual practices that include contact with faecal matter.
- A person is most infectious while they are ill and passing the organism in their stools (which may occur for months).

**WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?**
- The most common symptoms of giardiasis are diarrhoea, stomach cramps, bloating, nausea, loose and pale greasy stools, fatigue, and weight loss.
- Some people have no symptoms, however they can still pass the disease to others.
- The first signs of the illness will appear between 3–25 days (average 7–10 days) after a person becomes infected.
- Most people who are otherwise healthy recover in 4–6 weeks. Occasionally, symptoms last for longer periods.

**HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?**
- Giardiasis can only be accurately diagnosed through an examination of the faeces, by a test that is ordered by a doctor. See your doctor if you have symptoms.
- It is important for people with diarrhoea to drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Prescription drugs, including metronidazole and tinidazole, are available to treat giardiasis.

**THOSE MOST AT RISK**
Those most at risk of contracting giardiasis are:
- people in contact with infected children, such as other children, parents, and child care workers;
- people who drink contaminated water, such as hikers and campers.

**HOW IS IT PREVENTED?**
To avoid catching giardiasis:
- always wash hands thoroughly with soap and running water after: using the toilet, handling animals, changing nappies, other exposure to faecal matter, working in the garden; and before preparing food and drinks;
- do not drink untreated water from rivers, streams, lakes, dams and tanks. Boiling water from these sources for one minute will kill *giardia* and other parasites. Water purification tablets may kill *giardia*, but may not kill *cryptosporidium*. Some water filters may also remove these parasites;
- avoid consuming unboiled tap water and uncooked foods when travelling in countries where the water supply may be unsafe.

**TO AVOID SPREADING GIARDIASIS:**
- Keep small children who have diarrhoea home from preschool, child care, playgroups, or swimming pools, until their diarrhoea has completely stopped.

If you have giardiasis, while you are infectious:
- do not prepare food or drink for others;
- do not use swimming pools;
- do not share linen, towels and eating utensils with others.

*For further information please contact your local Public Health Unit, Community Health Centre, or doctor.*

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