

Independent Guide

Giardia and giardiasis



Independent workplace compliance

What is Giardia?

Giardia spp. is a microscopic, protozoan parasite that lives in the intestines of infected people and animals. Contaminated faeces spread the organism, which can survive in the environment (for example water and soil) for months.

Giardia spp. is a relatively common parasite worldwide, with "a reported prevalence of 2-7% in high income countries and 2-30% in low income countries (BMJ 2016;355:i5369)" and one of the main causes of gastroenteritis.

A report produced by Public Health England (PHE) in May 2018 looked at cases of Giardia spp in England and Wales between 2007 and 2016. The findings showed annual laboratory reports ranged from 3,054 (2007) and 4,492 (2016), with an average over the decade of 3,790. For 2016, fifty percent of reports came from just three regions, the South West (996; 22%), South East (766; 17%) and North West (524; 11%). There were however no foodborne or non-foodborne outbreaks of Giardia spp reported in England and Wales during 2016.

What is giardiasis and what are the symptoms?

Giardiasis is the name given to gastroenteritis caused Giardia spp.

As published in information provided by NHS, "the main symptoms of giardiasis are:

- smelly diarrhoea
- tummy pain or cramps
- farting (flatulence)
- smelly burps – they may smell like eggs
- bloating
- weight loss"

Symptoms usually develop between one and three weeks after exposure and can last for between two and six weeks, although in some instances much longer.

Some people when infected with Giardia spp can be symptomless and so unaware they have the disease, although they still have the potential to spread the parasite.

How is Giardia sp. spread?

Giardia spp. is typically spread through faeces, contaminating water, food, soil, or other objects (fomites). Where these are contacted, they can result in the parasite being ingested and causing disease. Giardiasis can also be spread by person-to-person contact or direct contact with animals.

The parasite can affect anyone, but an increased likelihood of becoming ill exists in groups or individuals including:

- children and childcare settings;
- those who drink untreated/contaminated water from springs, lakes, rivers, wells, etc.;
- those who swim/bathe/play in open water pools, lakes, or rivers;
- people with a weakened immune system; and
- Those having contact with infected animals or environments contaminated with faeces.

The PHE report referenced above, showed in 2016 people aged between 30 and 39 to give rise to most reported cases, followed by those aged 40 to 49 and 20 to 29. Under 10's produced the 4th most reports.



Assurity Consulting Limited

26 Redkirk Way Horsham West Sussex RH13 5QH
t +44 (0)1403 269375 e info@assurityconsulting.co.uk
w assurityconsulting.co.uk

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How is giardiasis diagnosed and treated?

Diagnosis is usually through microscopic analysis of a faeces sample and antibiotics (prescribed) are an effective treatment.

Additionally, it is also recommended if you are suffering from giardiasis:

- if you have diarrhoea keep hydrated and consider rehydration fluids as advised by a pharmacist or doctor; and
- if you are prescribed antibiotics, follow the instructions that come with them and/or advised by a pharmacist or doctor.

Minimising the risk of spreading Giardia spp.

As giardiasis can be spread between people in a number of ways, further advice from NHS identifies:

- wash your hands with soap and water frequently;
- separate clothing and bedding that may be contaminated from other laundry and wash it on a hot wash;
- clean toilet seats, flush handles, taps, surfaces and door handles regularly.
- do not prepare food for other people, if possible;
- do not share towels, wash cloths, flannels, cutlery and utensils; and
- do not use a swimming pool until 2 weeks after your symptoms stop.

Further information on Giardia and giardiasis including information in this guide:

[Giardiasis - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Giardia: guidance and data - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Giardia spp data 2007 to 2016, May 2018](#)

This guide is of a general nature; specific advice can be obtained from Assurity Consulting.

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FS 24510

EMS 84550

OHS 590676

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