

Giardia infection (giardiasis)

Giardiasis is a form of gastroenteritis (or 'gastro') caused by a parasite called *Giardia lamblia* or *Giardia duodenalis*. This parasite can live in the bowels of people or animals. Untreated water that comes directly from lakes and rivers may also contain *Giardia*.

Symptoms include diarrhoea, foul-smelling faeces (poo), cramping, gas, fatigue, nausea, and sometimes vomiting and weight loss. Fever and bloody faeces are not usually symptoms of *Giardia* infections. Many infected people have no symptoms.

In education and care services, children and staff who have had *Giardia* may no longer have any symptoms but may still be infected with the parasite. This means their faeces can still infect others. A person with active diarrhoea is more likely to spread the disease than one who does not have diarrhoea but still has the parasite in their faeces.

How it spreads

Giardia infections spread when:

- infected people do not wash their hands well after going to the toilet, and then contaminate food or surfaces
- people's hands become contaminated while handling infected animals or changing the nappy of an infected child
- people drink contaminated water.

Exclusion period

Exclude until there has not been any diarrhoea or vomiting for at least 24 hours.

Staff members with these symptoms should not handle food until there has not been any diarrhoea or vomiting for 48 hours (they can be assigned to other duties after at least 24 hours, or stay away from the service).

Some states and territories may have different requirements for gastroenteritis (diarrhoea or vomiting). Check if your state or territory has different requirements for gastroenteritis.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

If you have 2 or more cases of gastroenteritis in your service, contact your local public health unit for advice. This is legally required in most states and territories (except South Australia).

Actions for parents and carers

Keep your child at home until there has been no diarrhoea for at least 24 hours and they feel well.

Give your child plenty of fluids and talk to your pharmacist about rehydration solution options.

See a doctor immediately if your child cannot keep down any fluids. Babies under 6 months should always be seen by a doctor if they have gastro. If *Giardia* is found in your child's faeces, the doctor will recommend antibiotics.

Encourage your child to wash their hands regularly.

More information about *Giardia* infection

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of *Giardia* infection (healthdirect.gov.au/giardiasis).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.