



Giardiasis

This fact sheet can be made available in other languages or formats on request by contacting 0161 770 6666. For further information please see our detailed fact sheet Information for all.

What is giardiasis?

Giardiasis is an illness caused by a very small parasite (germ) called *giardia*. It causes diarrhoea which is often very smelly causing cramping stomach ache and wind. The illness may last for several weeks, it then resolves slowly sometimes over several weeks.

The incubation period (the time taken from swallowing the germs until the illness starts) is usually 7 – 10 days.

Who can it affect?

Anyone, but the illness can be more severe and prolonged in people with impaired immune systems. In the UK it is most common in children under 5 years old and young adults.

If you have diarrhoea, drink plenty of fluids. Giardiasis is one of the few stomach bugs where antibiotics help. The treatment is usually with a drug called metronidazole (Flagyl), which your GP can prescribe. It is very important that you do not drink alcohol while you are having this treatment.

How is giardiasis caught?

It can be caught in a number of ways:

- by swallowing the parasite passed from the bowel of another person who already has the infection. This can happen especially if hygiene is poor.
- From drinking untreated water which contains the parasite. This is more likely to happen abroad, and Giardia is one of the causes of traveller's diarrhoea.

- From contact with pets and animals that are infected, usually through poor hand washing

Do I need to stay off work or school?

You should stay away until you have been free from any symptoms for 48 hours.

Children should not play with other children or attend school or nursery until they are fully recovered and have been symptom free for this period of time.

If you work as a food handler or in healthcare, you must inform your employer and / or seek advice from your Environmental Health Dept.

How can I avoid catching it?

By good personal hygiene. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry with a clean towel:

- after going to the toilet
- after changing a baby's nappy
- after contact with pets and animals
- before preparing and eating food

If on picnics and there is no water available to wash hands, use disposable travel wipes.

Only drink water from safe sources – if not sure, boil it first. Avoid drinking untreated water e.g. from streams and lakes.

Take extra care on visits to farms or the countryside to wash hands thoroughly.

Keep pets away from food, dishes and worktops.

What do I do if I or a member of my household has giardiasis?

Make sure everybody washes their hands thoroughly with warm water and soap:

- after using or cleaning the toilet
- after looking after another person with diarrhoea / vomiting
- after changing a baby's nappy
- after handling or washing soiled clothes and bedding
- before eating or preparing food

Ensure each person affected has his or her own towel. You may need to supervise children to make sure they wash their hands properly.

Wash any soiled clothes, bedding and towels on a hot cycle of the washing machine. Keep soiled washing separate from the rest of the washing.

Clean toilet seats, flush handles and taps frequently with hot soapy water. The toilet bowl should be cleaned with a toilet brush and disinfectant. Make sure the disinfectant conforms to a British Standard and follow the instructions carefully, and keep it in a safe place away from children. Wear rubber gloves to clean the toilet and don't use the same pair for anything else.

Where possible, stay away from others (especially vulnerable people like the elderly and the very young) until your symptoms have stopped. Also, try to avoid preparing food for anyone while you have the symptoms.

Contacting us

If you would like more information you can contact us by:

Writing to

Food Safety Team, Chadderton Town Hall, Middleton Road, Chadderton, Oldham, OL9 6PP

Phoning

0161 770 4484

Faxing

0161 770 4500

Emailing

env.foodsafety@oldham.gov.uk

For information about food poisoning and related illnesses please see our other detailed fact sheets listed below:

- [Cryptosporidiosis](#)
- [Campylobacter](#)
- [Dysentery \(*Shigella*\)](#)
- [Enteric fever \(typhoid and paratyphoid\)](#)
- [E.coli O157](#)
- [Farm visits](#)
- [Food poisoning](#)
- [Hand, foot and mouth disease](#)
- [Hepatitis A](#)
- [Infectious diseases](#)
- [Salmonella](#)
- [Staphylococcus aureus](#)
- [Viral gastroenteritis \('Noroviruses'\)](#)

You can also get information from the following:

www.hpa-nw.org.uk - includes infection control guidance for Care Homes, Nurseries and Schools, as well as information on topical matters such as avian flu.

www.hpa.org.uk - further details on infectious diseases.

www.food.gov.uk - good hygiene practices and food safety.

We value your comments and suggestions

We want to provide good quality service for people in Oldham and as we are a public service you have a say in what we do. We want you to be completely satisfied with our services but to ensure this we need to know what you think. What do we do best? Where could we improve things? Do you have any ideas or suggestions? Only by listening to you can we give you the service you deserve.

If you wish to make a comment about our services you can e-mail us on customer.feedback@oldham.gov.uk

or you can phone us on 0161 770 4191

or you can write to us:

Complaints Officer
Strategy and Resources Directorate
PO Box 160
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Oldham, OL1 1UG

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