

Giardia (Beaver Fever)



What is Giardia?

Giardia (pronounced *Gee-are-dee-ah*) is a common parasite that causes an illness known as giardiasis. Most people know it as “Beaver Fever”. The parasite that causes “Beaver Fever” is very small and cannot be seen with the naked eye.

Where is Giardia found?

Giardia can be found in the digestive system of humans and animals (e.g., beavers, dogs, and farm animals) and outside the body (e.g., in a lake and in animal feces), where it can survive for long periods of time.

How do people become sick?

The parasite *Giardia* can cause people to become sick when they:

- Drink water contaminated with animal and/or human feces.
- Contact human and/or animal feces (e.g., hands contacting feces).

A diagram of the transmission of *Giardia* in water is provided in Figure 1.

Symptoms

Giardiasis symptoms vary, but may include:

- Severe diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Headaches
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Bloating

If you are ill, your physician should be able to prescribe an appropriate treatment.

Giardia and Drinking Water

In Newfoundland and Labrador most communities obtain drinking water from lakes, rivers, streams and ponds (surface water). These surface water supplies are subject to animal activity. The water supplies may become contaminated if the animals have *Giardia* and they deposit their droppings (feces) in the water.

Disinfection (e.g., chlorination) of drinking water may not be able to destroy *Giardia*. It is a hardy parasite. Illness from drinking *Giardia* contaminated water does occur in Newfoundland and Labrador. In fact, several communities have had to issue boil water advisories due to waterborne illness outbreaks caused by *Giardia*.

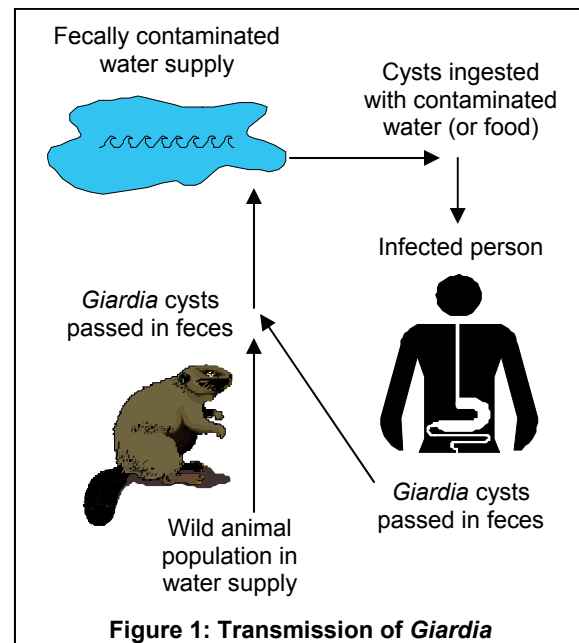


Figure 1: Transmission of *Giardia*

Is there a risk from drinking water directly from roadside springs, brooks and ponds?

Yes, people can become ill with giardiasis by drinking water from roadside springs, brooks and ponds and other surface water sources. Water from these sources may be contaminated with *Giardia*. Boiling water obtained from these sources will destroy disease-causing bacteria.

Do not drink water from sources with unknown water quality.

Giardia From Direct Contact With Feces

Coming into contact with *Giardia*-contaminated feces and then touching your mouth or food, may cause you and others to become ill with giardiasis. *Giardia*-contaminated feces can come from an infected person or animal. Because you will likely not know if feces contain *Giardia*, you must minimize your contact with feces and thoroughly wash your hands afterwards.

Prevention

To prevent infections from *Giardia*:

- follow any boil water advisory instructions (e.g., boil all drinking water for one (1) minute)
- don't consume untreated water (e.g., water from springs, brooks)
- wash your hands after using the toilet, changing diapers and before handling food. Teach children to wash their hands at these times as well.
- don't contact the feces of animals, especially those of your pets.

Thorough hand washing has been shown to reduce the transmission of *Giardia* from person to person.

Where can I find out more?

If you have any questions about drinking water safety, please do not hesitate to contact the Government Service Centre or Regional Health Authority nearest you.



Department of Health and Community Services
Department of Environment and Conservation
Department of Government Services
Regional Health Authorities

Revised March 2009

Drinking Water Awareness