



Information about *Giardia* Infection

Why Have You Been Given This Leaflet?

Your local council has a responsibility to investigate food poisoning and certain incidents of infectious disease. An officer from your local council's Environmental Health Department is contacting you to try and find out where your infection may have come from and to give advice on preventing further spread to others.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team has notified your local Environmental Health Department that you or one of your household is suffering from a *Giardia* infection. They are often the first to tell you what type of infection you have rather than your General Practitioner (GP).

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information and to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about *Giardia* infection. **Please take time to read this leaflet.**

What is *Giardia* infection?

Giardia infection is caused by a parasite called *Giardia lamblia*. This is an organism that lives in the bowels of an infected person or animal. It can cause gastro-enteritis (bowel upset) in people. The parasite can survive outside the body for long periods. It affects children more than adults.

Where does it come from?

The parasite can cause diarrhoea in wild and domestic animals such as cattle, sheep, dogs, cats and birds. It can be passed between animals and people, and can also contaminate water. It can be found in springs, burns, lochs and rivers and, sometimes, swimming pools. It can be found in the UK but is more commonly associated with recent foreign travel.

How can you get *Giardia* infection?

You can become infected by swallowing the parasite in a number of ways

- By not washing your hands thoroughly after touching faeces from another person or animal, for example when changing a nappy or from infected pets
- Touching animals particularly young ones such as lambs, calves, puppies or kittens and not washing hands afterwards
- Drinking or swimming in untreated water e.g. rivers, wells, springs or burns
- By eating and drinking food contaminated by unwashed hands, food washed with contaminated water, faeces or soil from an infected animal or person.

What are the usual symptoms?

Some people do not have any symptoms however, the main symptoms are

- Watery diarrhoea
- Foul smelling, greasy faeces
- Stomach pains, bloating and passing wind
- Nausea, indigestion and loss of appetite

When do these symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start 7 to 10 days after swallowing the parasite, although it can be as short as 3 days and as long as 25 days.

How long will the symptoms last?

Symptoms could last for several weeks and if the symptoms aren't treated they can lead to weight loss and dehydration.

How do you treat a *Giardia* infection?

A course of antibiotics treatment is recommended. Whole households may require to be treated at the same time as the infection spreads so easily.

It is important to drink fluids to replace the water lost through having diarrhoea and vomiting. This applies particularly for babies, children and the elderly.

If a young child has symptoms or if your symptoms continue or are particularly severe, consult your GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

Do I need to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities?

Yes, it is important to stay at home until you have had no vomiting or diarrhoea for 2 days.

What should I do if I have symptoms again?

If your symptoms return or become more severe (e.g. blood in diarrhoea) you should see a GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

What should I do if I know of others with similar symptoms?

Whole households may require to be treated at the same time as the infection spreads so easily.

If a young child develops symptoms or if an adult has symptoms which are severe or last for more than 2 days they should consult their GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

They should, if possible, submit a stool sample via their GP.

You should tell the officer of the Environmental Health Department the details of the others you know to be ill. This information can help in identifying sources of infection.

How can you avoid getting or passing to others a *Giardia* infection?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water

- Before preparing, handling or eating foods
- After handling raw food especially meat or poultry
- As soon as possible after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals
- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas
- After going to the toilet or changing a child's nappy
- By ensuring young children wash their hands.

Handle food and drink safely

- Thoroughly cook meat and poultry so that they are cooked all the way through, and no blood runs from them
- Thaw frozen food properly before cooking
- Always reheat food thoroughly
- Do not use the same knives, chopping boards and equipment for preparing raw foods and cooked or ready to eat foods
- Thoroughly clean knives, chopping boards and equipment used for preparing raw foods with hot water and detergent after each use
- Never put cooked food back on an unwashed plate previously used for uncooked meat
- Do not wash raw poultry because this will splash germs around
- Store cooked or ready to eat food in the fridge separately from raw meats. Raw foods should not be stored above or beside cooked or ready to eat food.
- Store uncooked meat on the bottom of the fridge to avoid dripping raw meat juices onto other food
- Wash all fruit, salads and vegetables that are to be eaten raw
- Do not drink untreated water or un pasteurised milk
- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Do not buy ready to eat foods from shops where you believe food hygiene standards are poor. Report such places to your local Environmental Health Department
- **Do not** prepare food for others until your diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms have been stopped for 48 hours.

Household Measures

Whilst you have symptoms you need to be scrupulously clean around your home.

- Make sure all members of your household wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and after handling soiled clothing or bedding
- Make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's
- Wash all soiled clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle that the manufacturer would recommend
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

Water Safety

- Do not use swimming pools (including hot tubs and paddling pools, etc.) if you have diarrhoea. You should wait until you have had no symptoms for 2 days
- Do not swim in water that may be contaminated
- Do not drink untreated water and avoid swallowing water when in lakes and swimming pools
- If your water supply is from a private water source please discuss this with the Environmental Health Department.

Where can you get further advice?

If you would like any further advice about *Giardia* infection or food hygiene, please contact your local Environmental Health Department. The local offices are listed below

Angus Council

Communities Department Dewar House
12 Hill Terrace
Arbroath
DD11 1AH
Website: www.angus.gov.uk
Email: envhealth@angus.gov.uk



Tele: 01241 435600

Dundee City Council

Environmental Protection Division
Environment Department
3 City Square
Dundee
DD1 3BA



Website: www.dundee.gov.uk
Email: food.safety@dundee.gov.uk

Tele: 01382 433710

Perth & Kinross Council

Environmental and Consumer Services
Pullar House
35 Kinnoull Street
Perth
PH1 5GD
Website: www.pkc.gov.uk
Email: enquiries@pkc.gov.uk



Tele: 01738 476476

Other useful sources of information

The National Hand Washing Campaign

www.washyourhandsofthem.com

The Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk

Travel and Immunisation Advice

www.fitfortravel.com

NHS 24

Tele: 111- www.nhs24.com

NHS Tayside

Health Protection Team
Directorate of Public Health
Kings Cross
Cleington Road
Dundee
DD3 8EA
Website: www.taysidepublichealth.com



Tele: 01382 596976 or 596987

Further copies of this information are available or can be downloaded from the above NHS and local council. This information can be made available in Urdu, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, large print, Braille or audio tape. Information in other languages and formats can be made available on request. Contact NHS Tayside Communications Department on 01382 424138.