

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 is found in the digestive system of humans and animals (e.g., beavers, dogs & 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.

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 (defecate) 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*.

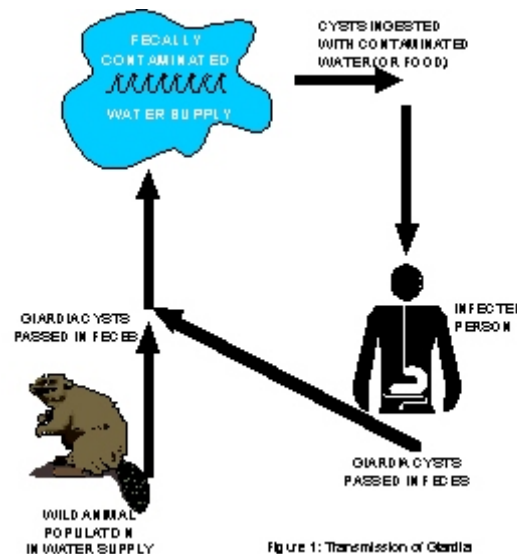


Figure 1: Transmission of *Giardia*

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 microorganisms.

Do Not Drink Water From Sources with Unknown Water Quality!

GIARDIA FROM DIRECT CONTACT WITH FECES

HOW IS GIARDIA TRANSMITTED THIS WAY?

Coming into contact with *Giardia* contaminated feces and subsequently 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 contains *Giardia*, you must minimize your contact with feces and thoroughly wash your hands afterwards.

SYMPTOMS

**IF YOU ARE ILL, PLEASE SEE
YOUR FAMILY PHYSICIAN**

Giardiasis symptoms are variable, but may include:

- ◇ severe diarrhea
- ◇ vomiting
- ◇ headaches
- ◇ stomach cramps
- ◇ nausea
- ◇ chills
- ◇ fatigue
- ◇ bloating

Your physician should be able to prescribe an appropriate treatment.

PREVENTION

To prevent infections from giardiasis:

- ◇ follow the 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)
- ◇ Make sure you 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 your pets.

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you have any questions about drinking water safety, please contact the Government Service Centre nearest you or your regional Health and Community Services Board.

Government Service Centre Locations:

Happy Valley Goose Bay
Corner Brook
Grand Falls-Windsor
Gander
Clareville
Harbour Grace
St. John's

Health & Community Services Boards:

St. John's
Holyrood
Gander
Corner Brook
Happy Valley-Goose Bay
St. Anthony



Department of Health and Community Services
Health and Community Services Boards
Department of Government Services and Lands

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT.....

GIARDIA

(Beaver Fever)



DRINKING WATER AWARENESS