

Giardia infection

County Medical Officer's infection prevention sheet, patient information

What is giardia?

Giardia is an intestinal parasite which can cause diarrhoea, nausea, gas and bloating in the abdomen. The time between infection and falling ill is usually one to two weeks. It is also possible to be infected without noticing. The infection can be treated with antibiotics. Giardia can remain in the gut for a long time unless treatment is received.

How is the disease transmitted, and when are carriers infectious?

Giardia is normally transmitted through food or drink containing the parasite. Giardia is destroyed by heating, which is why food and drink which is well boiled or fried does not present a risk. The parasite is present in faeces and can also be transmitted from person to person. This is why it is important to take care with hand and toilet hygiene. The patient is most contagious when suffering from diarrhoea, and this contagiousness declines rapidly when the patient is treated with antibiotics. Infection while travelling abroad is most common, but the infection can also spread in Sweden.

Anyone who has received treatment with antibiotics and is free of symptoms can often remain at work or attend school or preschool by following the rules of conduct and hygiene advice below.

What should you remember so as not to infect others? Rules of conduct and hygiene advice:

- You must not work when you have diarrhoea.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after visiting the toilet, before handling foods and before meals.
- Use liquid soap and your own towel or single-use towels.
- Keep the toilet and washbasin clean.
- If children in nappies are carriers of the disease, wash your hands thoroughly after changing their nappies. Keep your changing table very clean. Place used nappies in plastic bags which are then discarded with the rest of your refuse.
- You must not swim in a pool until at least one week has passed since the diarrhoea has ceased and your faeces have returned to normal.
- Children with diarrhoea must not attend preschool, but they can generally return to childcare if they are stable and symptom-free following treatment with antibiotics. Samples must be taken from preschool children approximately three weeks after the end of treatment with antibiotics.
- If you work with unpackaged foods, according to European food legislation you are obliged to notify your supervisor immediately if you are infectious.

Infection with giardia is what is known as a public health hazard according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. Therefore, you are obliged to follow the rules of conduct given to you by your doctor and to assist with contact tracing which aims to locate the source of the infection or other people who may have been infected.

You may request reassessment of the rules of conduct by the County Medical Officer in your county. You must follow the rules assigned to you before any such assessment is complete.