



Giardia

Research has recently found that the muskox on Bank's Island have been infected with a human strain of the Giardia parasite.

What is *Giardia*?

Giardia lamblia is a tiny parasite that can live in the intestines of humans and animals. This parasite has an outer protective shell that makes it resistant to harsh environmental conditions and allows it to survive outside of the body for long periods of time. When ingested, *Giardia* can cause illness, which is sometimes called 'Beaver Fever'. However, beavers are not the only reservoir. Once infected, the parasite can multiply and can be passed in the feces.

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Generally, symptoms occur six to 16 days after initial contact, but they *may* occur 3 days up to a month after the first contact.

What are the symptoms?

Diarrhea, upset stomach, bloating, fatigue and weight loss are the most common symptoms. Fever, chills, headache and vomiting may also occur.

Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk, however, some people are more at risk than others. Persons traveling in wilderness areas (hunters, trappers, campers or tourists), people who work at or attend a child-care facility and anyone with a severely weakened immune system (i.e., HIV or AIDS) are at a higher risk of infection.

How is an infection diagnosed?

The infection is diagnosed by collecting and testing stool samples by a health care provider.

How is *Giardia* infection spread?

The infection is spread when a person swallows anything that has come in contact with feces of a person or animal carrying the *Giardia* parasite.

Examples include:

- Swallowing contaminated water from lakes, rivers and streams. Even accidental swallowing of recreational water in pools and hot tubs can cause infection (because of the outer shell, *Giardia* can be resistant to chlorine).
- Animal-to-person transmission by handling animals or touching animal feces (pets or wild animals).
- Person-to-person transmission of feces from an infected individual. For example, in a child-care setting where dirty diaper contact occurs.
- Swallowing *Giardia* picked up from contaminated surfaces (toys, bathroom fixtures, diaper pails).
- Eating uncooked food contaminated with *Giardia*.

How can I prevent *Giardia* infection?

- If drinking water from lakes, rivers, springs or ponds **boil water for one-minute prior to ingestion.**
- **Hunters should take the following precautions:**
 - Wear rubber or disposable latex gloves while handling and cleaning game.
 - Thoroughly wash hands and all knives, equipment and surfaces that come in contact with game.
 - Do not eat, drink or smoke while handling game.
 - Ensure that all game is thoroughly cooked.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after using the toilet, changing diapers, before eating or preparing food, and after handling animals.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with safe water (boiled or bottled).
- If you have *Giardia*, avoid swimming in pools for at least 2 weeks after the diarrhea has stopped.

How are infections treated?

Specific kinds of anti-parasitic drugs should be used to treat the symptoms. See your doctor or health care provider.