



NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER

IMPROVING READINESS THROUGH PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION

Giardia in Recreational Waters

Giardia is a microscopic parasite (germ) that causes the diarrheal disease giardiasis. Water in swimming pools and natural bodies of water can become contaminated with *Giardia* from the feces of animals and humans who are infected with the parasite. *Giardia* has an outer shell that allows it to survive in harsh conditions but it can be destroyed within 45 minutes in a pool containing 1 part per million (ppm) free available chlorine where the pH is 7.5 or less. *Giardia* infection rates increase in late summer, coinciding with recreational water season.



Infection

Symptoms of giardiasis generally begin within one to three weeks of exposure. Swallowing contaminated water is how people are often infected. Giardiasis can cause a variety of intestinal symptoms, which include diarrhea, gas, foul smelling, greasy stools that float, stomach cramps, nausea and dehydration. Symptoms can last anywhere from two to six weeks. People who are in poor health or have weakened immune systems are at higher risk for more severe and prolonged illness.

Prevention

At recreational water facilities, early recognition and intervention is the best strategy. *Giardia* may be mitigated by both environmental and behavioral controls.

[Aquatics Operators and Managers should:](#)

- Establish, implement and enforce diarrhea exclusion policies for patrons and staff.
- Develop a fecal incident response plan and train staff on the response procedures. All diarrheal incidents are considered potentially high risk events for *Giardia* and Crypto.

[Installation Medical Treatment Facility:](#)

- Establish good communication and a strong working relationship with the aquatics operators and managers to ensure appropriate and timely response to *Giardia* outbreak concerns.

[Patrons of Recreational Water Venues should:](#)

- Avoid swallowing pool water at recreational water facilities.
- Protect others by not swimming if experiencing diarrhea (especially children in diapers).
- Shower before entering the water.
- Wash children thoroughly with soap and water after diaper changing or toilet use.
- Take children on frequent bathroom breaks and check their diapers often. Diapers should be changed in the bathroom, not at the poolside.

For More Information, Resources and Tools for Recreational Waters, visit:

- [Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Recreational Waters](#)