

Factsheet 55:

Food Safety

Giardia

Giardia are a group of flagellate protozoans (single celled animals) which grow in the intestinal tracts of both vertebrates and invertebrates and cause diarrhoeal disease in humans. The disease can be transmitted by direct contact with infected animals and humans, or by consumption of water, food or drinks contaminated by the faeces of infected humans or animals. Many cases are associated with recent foreign travel.

Incubation period

5 to 25 days.

Common clinical features

Diarrhoea, abdominal cramps.

Reservoir

Gastrointestinal tracts of people and animals.

Transmission

Person to person. Food borne transmission is rare. Faecal oral in young children. This means hands become contaminated during a visit to the toilet, and subsequent hand washing is insufficient. At some later point, there is hand to mouth contact allowing the illness to spread. This contact may be direct, or could be via a vehicle such as the toilet door handle, toilet flush, sink taps and so on. Spread within families is common. The disease can also be waterborne.

Other relevant features

Cysts resist standard chlorination, but other controls means it is extremely unlikely that any case could be linked to consumption of mains water.