Facts About *Giardia* and Swimming Pools

What is *Giardia* and how can it affect me?

Giardia (gee-ARE-dee-uh) is a **germ that causes diarrhea**. This germ is found in the fecal matter of a person who has been infected by *Giardia*. It has a tough outer shell that allows it to survive for up to 45 minutes even in properly chlorinated pools.

Giardia is a common cause of recreational water illness (disease caused by germs spread through pool water) in the United States and can cause prolonged diarrhea (for 1–2 weeks). It can make anyone sick.

How is *Giardia* spread in pools?

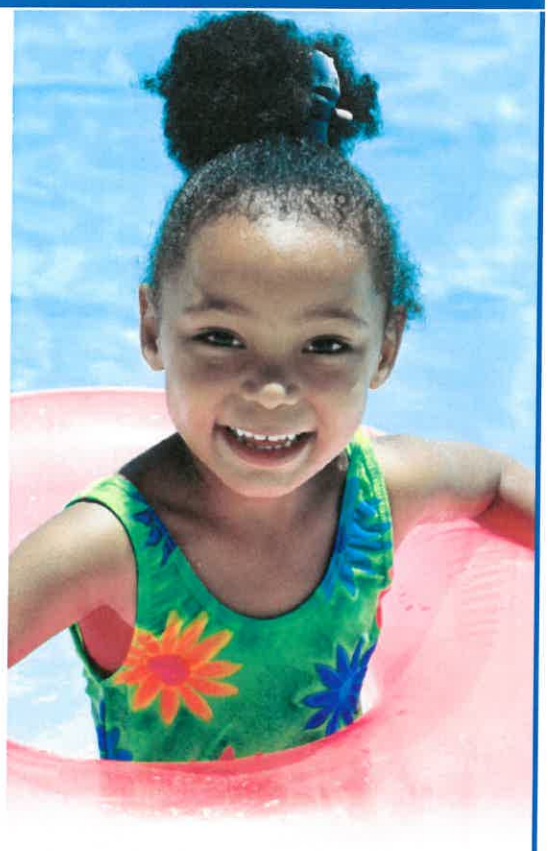
Giardia is **spread by swallowing water** that has been contaminated with fecal matter containing *Giardia*.

You share the water—and the germs in it—with **every person** who enters the pool. If one person infected with *Giardia* has diarrhea in the water, the water can be contaminated with millions of germs. Swallowing even a small amount of pool water that has been contaminated with the *Giardia* germ can make you sick.

Giardia can also be spread by swallowing contaminated water from water parks, interactive fountains, water play areas, hot tubs, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds, streams, and oceans.

How do I protect myself, my family, and other swimmers?

Take action! Because *Giardia* can stay alive for almost an hour even in well-maintained pools, stopping the germ from getting there in the first place is essential. Making sure that your pool has the right disinfectant and pH levels to kill *Giardia* is also critical.



Steps for Healthy Swimming

Keep the pee, poop, sweat, and dirt out of the water!

- Stay out of the water if you have diarrhea.
- Shower before you get in the water.
- Don't pee or poop in the water.
- Don't swallow the water.

Every hour—everyone out!

- Take kids on bathroom breaks.
- Check diapers, and change them in a bathroom or a diaper-changing area—not poolside—to keep germs away from the pool.
- Reapply sunscreen.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

Check the free chlorine level and pH before getting into the water.

- Pools: Proper free chlorine level (1–3 mg/L or parts per million [ppm]) and pH (7.2–7.8) maximize germ-killing power.
- Hot tubs/spas: Proper disinfectant level (chlorine [2–4 parts per million or ppm] or bromine [4–6 ppm]) and pH (7.2–7.8) maximize germ-killing power.
- Most superstores, hardware stores, and pool-supply stores sell pool test strips.

SWIMMERS AND PARENTS

For more information on preventing illness and injury at the pool, visit www.cdc.gov/healthyswimming

For further instructions on how to use pool and hot tub test strips, visit http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/protection/pool-spa-test-strip-instructions.html

POOL OPERATORS

For guidelines and resources on how to prevent *Giardia* and other germs from contaminating the water, visit http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/audience-aquatics-staff.html

http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/swimming/rwi/illnesses/giardia.html

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