



## Diarrhea While Hiking

Although there are many ways to get sick on the trail, the most common are exposure to **Norovirus**, **Giardia**, and **Coliform**

- **Norovirus** are a group of related viruses that produce inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract (stomach and intestines). It is characterized by nausea, vomiting abdominal cramping and diarrhea. Symptoms can also include lethargy, fatigue, muscle aches and headaches. If you have the symptoms... you are already contagious.

- The virus is transmitted by the oral-fecal route. Crowded spaces with contaminated surfaces, food and water sources and direct contact with other hikers are the most common ways you catch it.

- Onset occurs 8-12 hours after exposure. The disease usually lasts 1-3 days but can be debilitating especially when already dehydrated. There is no medication, it just has to run its course. Imodium may help but allowing your body to expel it may shorten the course.

- Avoidance is not always possible but, you can reduce the risk.

- Avoid shelters and crowded areas.

- Do not touch surfaces in privies.

- Wash your hands with soap and water... Hand sanitizer is not enough.

- Greet hikers with a wave, elbow or, fist bumps not handshakes.

- Do not reach into trail mix or other common food sources. Pour some out or use a clean scoop.

- Wash your clothing. Small particles of diarrhea or vomit can recontaminate you.

- Use a dining cloth when eating on common surfaces like picnic tables. How many hikers sat on the table top?

- Getting a Norovirus while in the woods away from the comforts of home can be devastating especially when already fatigued and dehydrated. There is a real tendency to spew vomit or diarrhea when the urge hits. However, particular care must be taken when near water sources and common areas to prevent an extended outbreak.

- Norovirus is tough to kill. Bleach works, but short of chemical decontamination, the virus can live for months in a moist environment... picnic tables and soils, etc.

- **Giardia Lamblia** is a parasite found in untreated water causing a disease commonly called “Beaver Fever” since it is ubiquitous with the presence of beaver feces. Other wild creatures that drink or graze in beaver infested waters can transmit the parasites to areas where there are no beavers. You can be exposed to Giardia in low quantities and not be symptomatic. Symptoms include severe watery diarrhea, greasy stools, abdominal pain, fatigue and weight loss... vomiting, blood in the stool and fever are less common.



- Giardia is found on food, soil or in water that has been contaminated with feces of an infected human or animal. They are protected by an outer shell (called a cyst) that allows them to survive outside the host body for long periods and makes them tolerant of chlorine disinfectant. People are infected when they ingest the Giardia cyst. These microscopic cysts are infectious and swallowing as few as 10 can cause someone to become ill. An infected host may shed as many as ten-billion cysts daily in their stool for up to several months, particularly when the illness goes untreated. <sup>(1,2)</sup>

- Although Giardia is uncommon in the general population, it is prevalent among hikers who don't treat their water. Giardia infections usually last 10 days to 2 weeks, however untreated it can last for months. Immediate

medical treatment is recommended... hard to do on the trail especially in the 100 Mile Wilderness. Diagnosis may be based on symptoms or through testing a stool sample. **All of the common filtration systems remove Giardia.**

- Treatment is administration of anti-parasitic medications such as Metronidazole. As with all diarrheal diseases, hydration, hydration, hydration. Get off trail and recover.

- Prevention is much easier than suffering with the disease. Specific actions to prevent the infection are:

-- While swimming in a pool, lake or other water bodies, do not swallow the water.

-- Do not drink surface water without boiling or filtration.

-- Maintain proper hygiene.

-- If visiting known areas of contamination, avoid tap water and uncooked products.

-- Wash your hands frequently.

-- Use a condom while having sexual contact.

- **Coliform** are bacteria produced in the gut of humans and other warm blooded animals. The best known is E-Coli. Infection with these bacteria can produce severe gastroenteritis, diarrhea, cramping and vomiting.

- As with the other diarrheal illnesses, it is largely a disease passed through the oral fecal route. Contaminated drinking water and direct contact are the primary means of transmission. Drinking water filtered, boiled, chlorinated or exposed to UV light will generally kill the bacteria. Clean water combined with frequent handwashing is preventative.

- Treatment for ecoli is with antibiotics such as amoxicillin, ciprofloxacin and carbapenems. An oral rehydration solution such as Pedialyte is strongly recommended.

[www.ALDHA.org](http://www.ALDHA.org)

(1) <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/giardia/>

(2) <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/giardia-infection/basics/definition/con20024686>