

To avoid giardiasis consider the following precautions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before handling food.
2. Avoid water or food that may be contaminated.
3. Wash and peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating.
4. When traveling in the backcountry, bring water if possible, or boil the water you will use for at least ten minutes.
5. Iodine purification tablets are quite effective in destroying *Giardia* cysts, but the water can taste pretty yucky. Water filters also are quite effective.
6. As sources of drinking water, avoid slowly moving streams, swampy areas, shallow ponds, and drainage areas because *Giardia* cysts are more likely to be found in higher concentrations in these areas.

With the number of backcountry recreationists growing every year, and with many municipal water supplies originating in these same popular recreation areas, it only makes good sense to practice proper backcountry hygiene. So, the next time you are hot and dry, and that beautiful, clear, cascading stream promises sweet, refreshing relief, remember what else it might promise.

Giardiasis Outbreaks in Montana

Outbreaks of giardiasis associated with municipal water supplies have occurred in two Montana communities.

In July 1977, sewage contaminated the White Sulphur Springs water supply and many residents contracted giardiasis. Fortunately, removal of the contaminated source and increases chlorination (chlorine kills many organisms) solved the problem.

In 1980, in Red Lodge, over 300 cases of giardiasis were reported. The peak occurred in summer. With such a high incidence in such a small community, the water supply was immediately suspect. Red Lodge receives its water from Rock Creek, a crisp mountain stream above town. But the creek is sometimes cloudy with silt and sediment, has impacts from livestock, residential development and beaver populations, and there have been problems with disinfection of the water supply. To combat this situation, the chlorine disinfection concentration was increased and the water is now filtered as well. In the United States in 1980, there were over 11,013 cases of giardia reported. It is likely more occurred that weren't reported!