

Chlorination Alone Won't Control Giardiasis

To the Editor:

Regarding giardia and cryptosporidium in our water systems, discussed by Prof. Daniel A. Okun in "We Need Watershed Protection and Filtration" (letter, May 26): Do not trust chlorination to control the intestinal disease giardiasis.

In communities neighboring the Saranac Lake area three substantial epidemics of giardiasis have been traced to contaminated community water systems that were chlorinated. Even the high concentration of chlorine in swimming pools is ineffective.

Giardia is best eliminated by either heat (boiling is not necessary, the temperature of domestic hot water suffices) or ultrafiltration (0.5 micron absolute maximum pore diameter). Community water systems may be filtered through sand filters, which are supposed, though they lack small pore size, to trap giardia by adherence to the sand particles.

Giardia is now ubiquitous, and I treat cases every month (and I and my family members have had it many times).

The most effective and often best tolerated drug for giardiasis is quinacrine. A five-day course costing only several dollars usually suffices. Unfortunately quinacrine is no longer obtainable in the United States. The manufacturer, Sanofi-Winthrop, lost its source of raw material.

Other sources are available to overseas manufacturers, yet they have not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Action by

the F.D.A. is critically important.

The alternative to quinacrine is metronidazole. Unfortunately, metronidazole is less effective and is a gastric irritant. Considering intolerance, allergy and failure, I estimate 10 percent of cases cannot be cured with metronidazole.

Difficult cases may require a combination of both drugs. To date this year three metronidazole failures have been cut off with quinacrine from my dwindling personal supply.

Since metronidazole is not F.D.A. approved for giardiasis and since quinacrine is no longer made, there is no longer any effective giardia drug approved and available in this country!

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