

FACT SHEET

For Public

CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS (Crypto)

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidium is a parasite that causes diarrhea in both animals and humans. People can become ill with cryptosporidiosis (often called "crypto") by coming into contact with persons or animals shedding the parasite or by drinking contaminated water. Cases occur year round with a peak during summer or early fall.

Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis. Children under 2 years of age, animal handlers, travelers, men who have sex with men, and close contacts of infected persons are more likely to be infected.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

Cryptosporidium is found in the feces (stool) of an infected person or animal. It is spread by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool from an infected person or animal. It can also be spread by swallowing contaminated food or water.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The major symptom of cryptosporidiosis is frequent and watery diarrhea accompanied by cramping belly pain. Other symptoms may include headache, nausea, vomiting, and low-grade fever. Some people have no symptoms. Symptoms may briefly improve and then get worse again, but people who are healthy usually get well in 14-30 days. Persons whose immune systems do not work properly may become seriously ill.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear between 1 - 12 days after infection with the parasite.

What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?

People who are healthy often improve without taking any medications. They should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration due to diarrhea. Consult with a health care provider before taking anti-diarrheal medication. A medication called nitazoxanide (Alinia®) may be used to treat some people with cryptosporidiosis.

What can be done to prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis?

- Always wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before handling food or eating, after using the toilet or changing diapers, and after contact with animals, especially cattle.
- Wash both the child's hands and their own after changing diapers.
- Avoid drinking raw milk, other unpasteurized dairy products, or unpasteurized juices.
- Wash all raw fruits and vegetables before serving.
- Dispose of feces in a sanitary manner, especially in child care centers or other institutional settings.
- Avoid drinking water from streams or lakes. Avoid drinking unboiled water while traveling in developing countries or whenever water quality is unknown. (Bringing water to a full, rolling boil is sufficient to kill *Cryptosporidium*, or use filters capable of removing particles 0.1-1.0 micrometers in diameter.)
- Adhere to local advisories to boil water.
- Avoid swallowing recreational water. Lakes, streams, other surface waters and swimming pools may be contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*. *Cryptosporidium* is resistant to chlorine and can survive for days in chlorine-treated water. Persons should stop using swimming pools or other aquatic facilities while ill and for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea resolves. People can pass the parasite in stool and contaminate water for weeks after symptoms have stopped.
- Crypto is resistant to bleach. Instead, use 3% hydrogen peroxide to clean.
- Ill individuals should remain out of child care, schools, and work until diarrhea is resolved.