

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Cryptosporidiosis

What you need to know

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis (krip-toe-spo-rid-e-o-sis) is a diarrheal illness caused by a microscopic parasite, *Cryptosporidium*. The disease is often called “Crypto.”

How is this parasite spread?

The *Cryptosporidium* parasite passes in the stool of infected persons and animals.

Infection occurs when a person ingests the parasite and only a few of these parasites are required to cause an infection. *Cryptosporidium* may be found in soil, food, water, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the feces from infected humans or animals. Likely means to get infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Touching your mouth with contaminated hands. Persons who do not wash his/her hands properly after using the restroom or changing diaper;
- Eating food that is not washed after being in soil or water that contains *Cryptosporidium*;
- Drinking water or beverage contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*;
- Swallowing recreational water while swimming or playing in rivers, streams, springs, lakes, swimming pools, and water parks contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*.
- Exposure to human feces through sexual contact.
- Exposure to wild or domestic animals (especially calves with diarrhea)

Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis. Persons with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of getting infected after exposure to cryptosporidiosis. Those include:

- Children who attend day care centers, including diaper-aged children
- Child care workers and parents of infected children
- Young children and pregnant women may be more susceptible to the dehydration resulting from diarrhea and should drink plenty of fluids while ill.
- If you have a severely weakened immune system, you are at risk for more serious disease. Your symptoms may be more severe and could lead to serious or life-threatening illness.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom is large amounts of watery diarrhea. There may also be cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache and loss of appetite. Persons with healthy immune systems usually have symptoms for two weeks or less. The symptoms may go in cycles in which you may seem to get better for a few days, then feel worse again before the illness ends. Persons with weak immune

systems may have much more severe and long lasting illness. Some persons infected with cryptosporidiosis may not have any symptoms, but they can still pass the parasite to others.

How do I know if I have cryptosporidiosis?

The stool of the ill person is sent to a laboratory where it is tested.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear from 2 to 14 days after exposure, but usually within 7 days.

How long can an infected person infect others?

The infected person can infect others when symptoms begin and for several weeks after the symptoms disappear. Infected persons who do not have symptoms can still infect others.

Should an infected person stay home from work, school, or child care?

People with diarrhea need to be excluded from child care, food service or any other group activity where they may present a risk to others. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea stops if they carefully wash their hands after using the restroom. Food handlers, children and staff in child care settings, and health care workers must obtain the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities.

How is cryptosporidiosis treated?

Most healthy infected individuals generally recover without treatment. However, the Food and Drug Administration has licensed a 3-day course of nitazoxanide oral suspension for treatment of children with diarrhea attributable to *C. parvum* and *Giardia lamblia*. Paromomycin, alone or with azithromycin dihydrate, is minimally effective. Persons with diarrhea should drink plenty of fluids. Medicine used to control diarrhea sometimes helps.

Cryptosporidiosis can be very serious and even cause death in persons with weakened immune systems. Persons with a weakened immune system should call their physician if they suspect they have cryptosporidiosis.

What can be done to prevent getting and spreading cryptosporidiosis?

- Avoid drinking untreated and improperly filtered surface water.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially after using the toilet, after changing diapers, and before eating or preparing food.
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Dispose of sewage waste properly so it does not contaminate surface or ground water.
- Children with diarrhea should be excluded from child care settings until the diarrhea has stopped.

Note:

You may not be protected in a chlorinated recreational water venue (e.g., swimming pool, Water Park, splash pad, spray park) because *Cryptosporidium* is chlorine-resistant and can live for days in chlorine-treated water.

For more information on Cryptosporidiosis, call (816) 325-7204

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