



Cryptosporidium

What is Cryptosporidium?

Cryptosporidium is a parasite. When this parasite is accidentally swallowed it can cause a diarrheal illness commonly referred to as Cryptosporidiosis. *Cryptosporidium* germs can be found on hands, in food, water, soil, or surfaces that have been contaminated with the stool of an infected person or animal.

How is it spread?

Cryptosporidium is commonly spread by swallowing the parasite unknowingly through food or water that has been contaminated with the stool of an infected person or animal. Coming into contact with the stool of an infected person, child or infant (for example, during diaper changes) may be another source of exposure. Pets and farm animals can become infected with *Cryptosporidium*. Not properly washing your hands after handling or cleaning up after these animals may expose you to this parasite.

What are the symptoms?

Frequent watery diarrhea along with stomach cramps is common. Some people experience fever, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. These symptoms usually start 1-12 days after you have been exposed to the parasite. In healthy people, including children, the illness could last up to a month. You may be infected and experience no symptoms at all. People with underlying medical conditions, especially those with HIV, may experience more severe symptoms which can lead to serious complications. Make sure to share your full medical history with your health care provider.

What is the treatment for Cryptosporidium?

Most healthy people recover with simple oral rehydration and without having to take any medication. Consult your health care provider for treatment recommendations.

How do I protect myself and others?

- It is important to wash your hands after using the toilet, before preparing or eating meals, after changing diapers, and after being in close contact with animals.
- Do not drink untreated water from shallow wells, lakes, rivers, springs, ponds and streams. The concentration of chlorine used in routine water treatment does not kill *Cryptosporidium*. If you are unsure of the safety of your drinking water, boil your water for 1 minute to destroy the parasite or use an approved filtration system that will effectively remove it.
- Avoid swallowing potentially contaminated recreational water (e.g. swimming pools, wading pools, lakes).
- Do not drink raw or unpasteurized milk and fruit juices.
- Wash and/or peel all raw vegetables and fruits before eating. Use safe, uncontaminated water to wash all foods that are to be eaten raw.
- Cook raw meats thoroughly.
- To prevent travel related illnesses avoid eating uncooked foods where you are unsure of water treatment and sanitation systems. Eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked and are still hot. Safe beverages include tea and coffee made with boiled water and carbonated bottled beverages with no ice. Avoid tap water, or ice made from tap water.

Is there anything special I need to know?

If you are infected with *Cryptosporidium*, and you provide services to others, particularly seniors or children, you should not go to work while you are experiencing symptoms. Your employer will determine when it is safe for you to return.

Protect others by not swimming if you are experiencing diarrhea. Avoid public recreational waters for 2 weeks after your symptoms have gone away. It is possible that even after you are feeling better you will still be shedding the parasite in your stool for a period of time.

To prevent spreading the disease to people around you always practice good hand washing and personal hygiene.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809