



CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

What is cryptosporidiosis?

Cryptosporidiosis is a disease that causes watery diarrhea (loose stools). It is caused by microscopic parasites called *Cryptosporidium*, or “Crypto” for short. *Cryptosporidium* are found in water, food and soil, and on surfaces or dirty hands contaminated with the feces (stools) of infected humans or animals. In the United States between 2001 and 2010, Crypto was the leading cause of waterborne disease outbreaks linked to recreational water.

Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis. Persons with weakened immune systems are at higher risk of getting infected after exposure to cryptosporidiosis. People who are most likely to become infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Children who attend childcare centers, including diaper-aged children
- Childcare workers
- Parents of infected children
- Older adults (ages 75 years and older)
- People who take care of other people with Crypto
- International travelers
- Backpackers, hikers, and campers who drink unfiltered, untreated water
- People who drink from untreated shallow, unprotected wells
- People, including swimmers, who swallow water from contaminated sources
- People who handle infected calves, sheep, or deer
- People exposed to human feces (stools) through sexual contact.

How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

The *Cryptosporidium* parasite passes in the stool of infected persons and animals. Infection occurs when the parasite is ingested by a person and only a few of these parasites can cause an infection. Ways to get infected with *Cryptosporidium* include:

- Persons who do not wash hands properly after using the restroom or diapering
- Food that is not washed after being in soil or water that contains *Cryptosporidium*
- Drinking water contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*
- Swimming or playing in rivers, streams, springs, lakes, swimming pools, and water parks contaminated with *Cryptosporidium*
- Exposure to wild or domestic animals.

What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The most common symptom is large amounts of watery diarrhea (loose stools). 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. However,

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Frequently Asked Questions

symptoms may last as long as 30 days. During this time, symptoms may come and go. Occasionally, cryptosporidiosis can cause an infection in the gallbladder or the lining of the lung, causing pneumonia. 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 soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually last about one to two weeks (with a range of a few days to four or more weeks) in people with healthy immune systems.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

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. People with diarrhea need to be excluded from childcare, 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 childcare settings, and health care workers must obtain the approval of the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health before returning to their routine activities.

What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?

Most people with healthy immune systems will recover from cryptosporidiosis without treatment. 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 a person or community do to prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis?

- Avoid drinking untreated and improperly filtered surface water.
- Wash hands carefully for at least 30 seconds:
 - After using the restroom
 - Before preparing foods
 - After completing food preparation
 - After handling animals, especially cattle
 - After working in soil
- Wash fresh fruits and vegetable before eating.
- Dispose of sewage waste properly without contaminating surface or ground water.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

<https://www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/cryptococcosis-gattii/index.html>

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Revised: 09/2022

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